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IN A SILVER SEA
B. L. FARJEON





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IN A SILVER SEA.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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IN A SILVER SEA.

PROLOGUE.

THE LEGEND OF THE SILVER ISLE.

PART I.—THE SIN.

THIS precious stone, set in a silver sea, was an island, from which a bird might fly to England's shore and back within the limits of the shortest day. A priceless jewel, graced with loveliest form and colour; on one side rock-bound, plashed day and night by snowy spray and foam, and, on the other, lying asleep in a bed of velvet sand, over which the salt waves idled and murmured sweetest dreams. It was Nature's holiday ground. The valleys were summer-warm long after summer had passed away, and as one lifted one's head to the beautiful sky, the sun's bright rays shone upon the face, while the crisp fresh air, with a taste of mountain snow

in its breath, kissed brow and lip. The seasons were in sweet rivalry. Sometimes even in December the eye would light upon a wonder; green valleys “with daisies powdered over,” and the winds would be fragrant with violets, as though Spring’s wondrous birth were near; while on the north side of the Silver Isle, where rock and peak were nearest to heaven, lay a basin of eternal snow, its white bosom gleaming in the sun’s eye from year’s end to year’s end.

On the breast of the loftiest range in the Silver Isle, seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, rested this basin of eternal snow, soft, and still, and treacherous. The road to it lay over sharp rocks and dangerous surprises formed by chasm and precipice, into many of which a ray of sunlight had never wandered. The islanders avoided it in terror. On moonlight nights they would point fearlessly to the shadows gliding over the white surfaces, never for a moment still, ever changing with the changing aspect of the moon as the clouds passed across its face; and, walking in the plains and valleys, would cross themselves as a protection

against the evil spirits that haunted the spot and held unholy revel there. From their youngest days they were warned never to attempt to reach the snow-land that looked so fair and pure. "Sin is there," they were told, "and Death. Its bosom is stained with blood. Who ventures there is lost" On stormy nights, when the heavens were black, their imaginations conjured up dread shadows moving on the heights, and, sitting by their firesides, parents would relate to their children strange stories of the mysterious world that touched the sky, and the little ones would tremble, and hide their faces in their frocks at the sound of thunder pealing over the mountain tops. Then, mayhap, a lull in the storm would occur, and the mothers would say,—

"Be not frightened, children. The storm has ceased. Evil flies from the presence of the White Maiden. She is on the mountain."

These stories, handed down from generation to generation, lost nothing of the fantastic in their transmission. They grew like the spreading of circles on the surface of a peaceful lake, and gathered

weird terrors from the spirit world which surrounds the real. The islanders believed in the supernatural; in their primitive life the invisible was a power from which rare streams of fancy flowed. Spirits lived in the mountains, and haunted their woods and streams; and Nature's voice, heard in wind or breeze, in the hushed harmony of forest life or the sweet plashing of the mountain rill, in drowsy lullaby or the fierce contention of the elements, was pregnant with significant meaning. Apart from these poetical currents the Silver Isle was rich in themes of passion and suffering, and the legend connected with the basin of snow had its origin in a seed sown by human hands.

How many years ago no man could say, for the deed lived only in the memory, and was not witnessed by the oldest grey-beard among them, an unforeseen and fearful crime was committed in the isle. In that little world were two men who, by force of natural gifts, had grown to be like kings in the land. The influence they wielded over the community was unbounded. Famous were they for their strength and beauty, for their knowledge of husbandry,

for the love they bore each other. They were the idols of the island, and gave the word when to sow, when to reap, when to gather in the harvest. Questions of moment were submitted to them for decision. All men yielded to them, followed them, obeyed them. Their word was law, and their power was maintained, not by the strong hand, but by gentleness and wisdom. Their house of pine wood was set on the crown of a hill, above the valleys in which the warm winds lingered. It seemed right that they should live apart from their fellows. They were the eagles of the isle, bright-eyed, strong-limbed, and long enduring. In hunting, shooting, and feats of endurance they were the masters of all. The land around their house had been cleared and made arable by their own strong hands, and in a community of able tillers they were renowned for their skill with the plough.

Celibacy was not uncommon in the Silver Isle ; and for that reason, and because the moral stature of the brothers was so far above that of their fellows, it was not a matter for wonder that they had not found their mates among women.

For their sakes many remained single, unblessed and uncomplaining, for the brothers trifled with no maiden's affections. But it is not for men to lay down a law for themselves in this respect; nature is not to be denied, and when the brothers had passed their fourth decade, the spirit of love touched their hearts. It proved their destruction. They were both drawn to a lovely girl of eighteen summers, an orphan, who exercised an almost magic power over the islanders. As the brothers were the heroes, so Evangeline was the heroine of the Silver Isle. Universally beloved, she brought happiness to the young and comfort to the old. She was not aware that the irresistible influence of her sweet nature, no less than that of her beauty, made these strong men weaker in her presence than the weakest reed. Her soul was the soul of a chaste and modest maiden, and her conduct was innocent and pure. Truly her heart was bound to the elder of the brothers, and the time came when the lovers stood hand in hand, bathed in the light of the sunrise of love.

“Rejoice with me, my brother,” said

the chosen one. “Blessed as my life has been, it is now to be doubly blessed. Evangeline is mine.”

“Thine!” exclaimed the younger brother, with a haggard look.

For him, in that fatal moment, the world grew dark. But one bright star remained—the guileless maid who raised her face to his to receive a brother’s kiss. All other light was blotted out.

He kissed her with lips as cold as snow, and she stood between the brothers with unwavering faith in both.

“You are my brother now,” said Evangeline, gazing with innocent trust into the face of the younger man.

“Aye,” he answered in a hoarse voice.

“If aught befall me,” said the happy lover, “thou wilt protect Evangeline.”

“To the death.”

This was a sacred custom in the isle. One brother dead, the other remained to comfort the bereaved heart—with a husband’s love, if it were so agreed.

When it became known that the elder brother had chosen Evangeline for his mate, the hearts of the islanders were filled with gladness. “The race of heroes

will not now die out," they said. Fêtes were held to celebrate the approaching union of one of the heroes of the Silver Isle with the loveliest maiden who had ever graced it. It was a time of universal rejoicing. The wedding-day arrived—a fair and sunny day. Smiles were on every lip; the houses and the church were bright with flowers. In the morning the bridegroom's brother presented himself at the house of the bride to conduct her to the church. He gave her the bridal flowers, and she placed them in her bosom and in her hair. Her waist was engirdled with white roses. Her heart was a garden of sweet thoughts. They walked to the church, followed by the islanders, who made this day a general holiday. By right the bridegroom should have been in the portal of the sacred house to receive his bride, but he was absent. The sundial marked the appointed time, and the man who should have been the first to arrive did not make his appearance. It was strange, for he had never been a laggard. His brother was questioned.

"What detains him?"

"I know not."

“Saw you him this morning?”

“No. I saw him last at midnight. He said he wished to be alone, to commune with his heart and with God. Such would have been my desire, had his happy lot been mine. We kissed and parted.”

“He was well?”

“He was well.”

“Whither went he?”

“I cannot say.”

“In what direction?”

“In the direction of the snow mountain.”

At the words “Such would have been my desire, had his happy lot been mine,” Evangeline suddenly turned her eyes towards him. Some unaccustomed note in his voice had strangely moved her; but only on her ears had it fallen with significance. She did not speak.

No other man in the Silver Isle had information to give. Many on the previous night had seen the brothers depart from the valleys with their arms around each other, embracing. They walked towards the heights in loving converse, as they had often done in the byegone time.

The day waned, and still no bridegroom.

The islanders stood about in clusters, endeavouring to account for his absence. They sent scouts in search of him, who returned unaccompanied and unsatisfied; no trace of him could be discovered. The islanders questioned Evangeline. She did not hear their first words. Her eyes wore an inward look; she was searching the past for new meanings to words, gestures, glances, which, at the time they were given, seemed capable only of honest construction. She was as one in a troubled dream.

“Evangeline, listen to us.”

“Ah, pardon me! What do you wish to say to me?”

“You know no cause why your bridegroom should not be here?”

“I know of none. God may; I do not.”

“All was well between you?”

“He never spoke ungentle word to me, nor I to him. There was nothing concealed between us, nothing to be concealed. I knew his heart; he knew mine. Dear friends, my trouble is great.”

They turned to the brother again.

“Last night, when you parted from him, he said he would be here to-day?”

“ Assuredly. To be united with this sweet flower who was to bring heaven into his life.” He might have added, “ And hell into mine ! ” but he kept his thought close.

Yet it seemed as though Evangeline had some consciousness of it. She looked into his face for a moment. He returned her look with a wild and tender smile. She drew him aside, so that no other ears could hear what passed between them.

“ Will he come ? ”

“ I would—from the grave ! ”

He peered around into the air, expecting a presence that was not among them. Again she looked into his face. Again he returned her look with a wild and tender smile.

“ Have you a secret ? ” she asked, in a whisper.

“ Yes. A heart secret.”

“ Can I read it ? ” .

He replied with a sigh that was like a groan. He held her hand in his. Hers was cold as ice ; his, hot as flame.

The day drew its slow and mournful length. A funereal gloom fell upon the isle. The islanders made many efforts

to induce Evangeline to accompany them home; she would not yield to their entreaties. "We will stay yet a little while," she said, and "yet a little while," again and again. Evening came; the western skies were stained with blood. It was useless to stay longer. Evangeline's friends made a last effort to lead her away, but she still refused to quit the church.

"I must stay here," she said.

"Alone? Dear child, be persuaded; come with us!"

"I must stay. I shall not be alone." She spoke now to the brother. "You will not leave me?"

"I will never leave you!"

Fading flowers lay about her feet. Her friends still lingered, but she entreated them to go.

"Am I not in safe hands? Here stands my brother, who will protect me from harm. Go, dear friends; God tells me it will be for the best. Good night."

"Good night, Evangeline. Dear child of our hearts, good night! We shall watch and pray for you. All will be well to-morrow."

They kissed and embraced her, then slowly left the place, with many a fond and lingering look behind. When night fell, only Evangeline and the younger brother were in the church. For a long time there was silence. No sound was heard within those sacred walls until the man heard a voice cry,—

“Cain!”

He replied with a shudder,—

“Who calls?”

Again he heard the voice,—

“Where is thy brother?”

“I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

In those familiar words, uttered in a tone of suppressed agony, upon the girl’s affrighted soul flashed the awful truth, of which, indeed, she had already a vague foreshadowing. She heard not the questions, for they proceeded from no human tongue. It was the man’s conscience that had spoken in the dread stillness of the night.

Only for a few moments did Evangeline’s heart faint within her. Her hand slipped from the man’s grasp, and she sank to the ground in a passion of silent grief and

horror. Then she bit her lips until the blood came, and rose and stood close beside him.

“Evangeline,” he whispered, “have you aught else to say? I am ready to answer.”

He had a pitiless desire to be questioned. The torture of his secret was too great for him to bear.

“I have said nothing,” she replied. “I have not spoken.”

“Whose voice, then, did I hear?”

“If you heard any,” she said, “it was God’s.”

“So be it. Evangeline, are you very unhappy?”

“Most unhappy!”

“You must be tired. It has been a weary day.”

“A day never, never to be forgotten in this world or the next! I did not come prepared. The bridal flowers you brought me are still in my bosom. What mockery! What mockery!”

“You are not afraid of me?”

“No, I am not afraid of you.”

“Why did you elect to remain here with me?”

“To hear your confession.”

“Listen to it. I love you! I love you!”

“Ah, me! Is love a poison, then?”

“I love you! No man ever loved woman as I love you! No woman can ever again be loved as you are loved. Time and the worlds contain for me but one hope—Evangeline!”

All the passion of which man’s nature is capable was expressed in this utterance. It was as though the man had said, “My salvation is in your hands. My crime was yours. You drove me to it.” In that sense she accepted it.

“Come,” she said, “and let me see of what I have been guilty. If there is blood upon my soul I must face it.”

“What would you do?”

“I would know the truth. I would see the truth. Come, Cain, and show me my crime!”

He accepted with a ghastly smile the name by which she called him. Had he not already answered to it? They walked into the open. There was a glimmering light in the sky; the moon had not yet risen. He gazed into Evangeline’s

face, and its pallid beauty pierced his heart like a sharp knife.

“Does my misery hurt you?” she asked. “I am sorry. You must already have suffered much.”

The hapless girl’s voice expressed such utter desolation that a terrible yearning took possession of him to console her. He held out his arms entreatingly to her.

“Evangeline,” he cried, “trust me with your future. Find comfort here.”

A gasp of most exquisite suffering escaped her. With her open palm upon his breast, she kept him from embracing her.

“Teach me first to forget,” she said; and then she asked plaintively, “Why have you loved me?”

“Why are we glad when we see the sun?”

“There are so many better than I, more worthy of you, closer to you in wisdom and strength. I am neither wise nor strong; I am but a poor unfortunate girl, born to destroy.”

“Born to bless, to save! In all this world, there moves not a being so fair, so beautiful.”

“And believing thus, you loved me.”

“Accept it so.”

“If,” she said solemnly, “my beauty has ensnared you, you must not be condemned for it. I am truly most guilty. Give me your tablets.”

He handed them to her. She wrote a few words upon them, and entering the church, laid them on the altar, and afterwards rejoined him.

“You know that your brother loved you with a most perfect love.”

“So loved I him, until—”

“Until,” she said, with a wild sob, “I stepped between you, and led you to destruction. Ah! how he worshipped you! You were the embodiment of a divine nobility and strength by whose example men were led nearer to their Creator. All that was base and sordid withered at your touch. You were his hero, his angel, upon whose lightest word he would have staked a thousand lives, had they been his to lose. He taught me to look up to you as I do to God. You were to guide us in all things. ‘If any crisis in your life occurs,’ your brother said to me, ‘and I am not near, place your hand in my brother’s hand. He will

shelter and protect you, as I would do. Have full faith in him, in his bravery, in his heroism. What is right to be done he will do, at whatever risk, for your sake and mine.' I have treasured his words. A crisis in my unhappy life has come, and your brother is not here. I place my hand in yours. I have full faith in you. You will do what is right to be done."

"Demand it of me. I will do it."

"Take me, step by step, over the ground you and your brother walked last night. Do not fear. I shall not faint by the way."

A strong man's strength seemed to have entered the body of the weak and hapless girl. There was no faltering in her steps as, hand in hand, they walked together towards the mountain of snow. The unfrequented route they traversed was marked by falling leaves from the bridal flowers in her bosom and hair, and now and then she plucked a rose from her girdle and scattered its leaves upon the road. Onward they walked, steadily, unrelentingly. Only once did they look back. They were on the heights, and paused, prompted by Evangeline.

"It was from this point," she said, "our dear friends below saw you and your brother clearly, with your arms round each other's neck, embracing. It was a brighter night than this, but if they are looking this way they can distinguish our forms, and they will know by our quiet attitude that we are outwardly in harmony with each other."

She gazed wistfully upon the houses of the islanders which dotted the plains and valleys beneath. The cot in which her happy maidenhood had been passed was within view, and there were lights in the window of her own little room, to woo her back to peace and home. She recognized the meaning of the tender sign, and answered the pathetic entreaty expressed in the lights.

"Never again! Oh, never, never again!" and then she breathed the word "Farewell!"

They resumed their journey over the stony ranges, upward and ever upward. Side by side they walked, treading in dead footsteps. The lower world grew less, and the lights in the isle so faint that they could now scarcely be distin-

guished. The unknown world was before them.

“Your brother and you,” said Evangeline, “did not walk this road in silence last night?”

“We spoke of many things, of many persons, chiefly of you.”

“Of none other?”

“I have said, of many.”

“You had a mother who is remembered with tenderness and reverence. Did she find no place in your converse?”

“You are torturing my soul with your questions!”

“Are you pleading to me for pity, because you fear to face the truth? You have not, then, your brother’s nature. Be silent if you choose, and leave me to find my way alone.”

He spoke now in a set, stern voice: “We spoke of our mother, of the lessons we learned at her knees, of her goodness, of the grand purity of her life. We recalled all the tender reminiscences of the past. The stream we used to bathe in; our woodland rambles; our dreams; our fancies; our vow to live our lives together, to share each other’s joys, each other’s woes—a vow

repeated when our judgments ripened and we were men. We dallied with sweet memories. Hold!" he cried suddenly. "Take not another step forward! It is death! On the edge of this precipice we kissed, and parted."

"At whose desire?"

"At his. He wished to be alone."

The crescent of the moon rose over the snow mountain, and Evangeline saw that they were standing upon the brink of a narrow precipice, which shelved sheer down into an awful chasm, formed by the splitting of the rocks on either side. No man's eye could pierce the gloom, and no man's foot could tread the perilous descent.

"And then?" whispered Evangeline. "And then? Proceed. There is more to tell."

"I walked slowly away. Had my will been in my own control, I should have fled in haste, but a demon held me in his power. My feet were as heavy as lead; I could scarcely drag them on. Exhausted, I was forced to stop and rest; and then the demon whispered poisoned words, and conjured up visions of happiness which maddened me. I strove to thrust them

from me, and, rising, would have continued my path to the valley, but an unseen force impelled me in the direction of my brother. My feet were free now ; I hastened quickly back. I found him here, lying on the ground, kissing a love-lock you had given him. The madness of jealousy, suddenly aroused to action, fell upon my soul and blinded me ! The air was thick with phantoms ! Voices cried to me, ‘Here lies he who bars your way to heavenly happiness ! What deed is too terrible for dear love’s sake ?’ I raised a mass of rock, and hurled it forward. It thundered down the abyss. When sight was restored to me, I saw not my brother ! ’

The girl inclined her body towards him, and gasped in horror,—

“Not a sound ? Not a cry ? Gone, without a sign ?”

He scorned to lie.

“A wail rose from the abyss. Your name—Evangeline ! ”

“His last word ! His last thought ! Oh, God be praised that he was mine in death, as in life ! ”

She knelt swiftly upon the brink of the precipice. He held her tight so that she

should not fall over. The moon's light had grown stronger now, and she could see more clearly. Her eyes searched the ground with feverish eagerness, and found what they sought—stains of blood upon the rocks, the life-blood of her lover lying dead in the black depths below! She pressed her lips to them, and kissed them again and again with sobs and cries of love, and presently, when her paroxysm was over, she rose, and with a sudden and violent effort, twisted herself from the grasp of the man who held her. The movement was so unexpected that he had no power to prevent it, else it were an easy task for him to have borne the light, slender form to a place of safety.

“Stand where you are!” she cried. “Move but a hair’s breadth towards me, and I fling myself into the abyss!”

They were separated by more than an arm’s length, and he dared not stir. The girl’s voice convinced him that her life hung upon his slightest movement. Firm and still as the rocks around them he stood, with his dark eyes fixed upon Evangeline; and she, like a white spectre in the light of the moon, faced him with steadfast look.

“Have you more to say?” she asked.

“I have told you all. I have darkened your life; but in my deep, undying love, there is still a hope for you and for me !”

“What would you have of me ?”

“The redemption of your pledge.”

“Am I, then, pledged to you ?”

“It is a law of the isle. In my brother’s life you were his; now you are mine. I have made you so by my crime ! I claim you !”

“It is true,” she murmured. “I am his, or yours. But if I were dead—do not stir ! There is danger in it ! If I were dead—”

“I should follow you to the other land.”

“Who, then, would claim me—you, or your brother ?” Slowly she unwound the girdle of roses round her waist, and dropped them into the abyss. “There is but one hope of salvation for you—to live, when I am gone, and endeavour to expiate the crime which has blasted the happiness of three lives. If you do not this, my hate shall follow you through the life beyond the grave, and, with my hate, his who lies below awaiting me ! I have no feeling but sorrow for you now; I pity

you from my heart. May God pardon you, as I do ! But before you meet us in the hereafter, you must wash the blood-stains from your soul ! I charge you to live and perform this work of repentance, for my sake, whom you have destroyed, for your brother's, whom you have slain. This is my bridal night—here, my bridal couch ! Farewell ! ”

She allowed herself to fall backwards into the abyss, and the man stood alone upon the brink !

PART II.—THE EXPIATION.

At sunrise the following morning the islanders went to the church to seek Evangeline. It was already known that she had not passed the night in her home. In the church they found the tablets left by Evangeline upon the altar, and written on them these words,—

“ None but I am guilty. The sin is mine, and mine only, and I go to atone for it. Be merciful to me, as God will be ! If you can think of me with tenderness, I

shall be glad. I shall know, for my spirit will live for ever in this dear isle.

“EVANGELINE.”

The sin was hers! What sin? Evangeline, the pure, the spotless maid, the child of their hearts, gone from among them with a sin upon her soul! They would have scorned themselves had they for a single moment allowed the belief to linger in their minds.

Whither had she gone? The last that was seen of her was when she was standing on the heights the previous night. Her lover's brother was with her, and it was observed that they were at peace with one another. Their attitudes proclaimed it.

Her spirit would live for ever in this dear isle! Was she, then, dead? They dared not give utterance to the thought. But they mourned for her as for one lost to them.

“She has gone from us,” they said, “our sweet Evangeline, in the flower of her youth!”

Old men and women wept as they would have done at the death of a beloved daughter, and the younger ones went

about their duties oppressed with a heavy weight of sadness. They had lost more than a friend: they had lost a child, a sister, in whom their brightest hopes were centred. Every household felt the bereavement. Truly their hearts went out to the hapless Evangeline.

But was she really dead? If so, they must find her body, and bury it in the sweetest spot in their beautiful isle, where flowers would bloom and birds would sing above her grave. The performance of this last sad office was a sacred duty.

By the aid of the bridal flowers which were scattered on the road they tracked Evangeline up the heights. Their search was vain—they discovered nothing. Beyond a certain point all traces were lost, and nought remained to direct them farther. They returned to the plains in sad perplexity. Every flower they found was treasured, and distributed among Evangeline's dearest friends. For long, long afterwards the faded leaves were shown by the old people to their grandchildren, and Evangeline's story told, with tearful eyes and in tones of tenderness.

Later on, wrath was mingled with

sadness. A guilty deed had been perpetrated—a fatal mystery was in their midst, and the clue was in the hands of those who held aloof from them. Where was the bridegroom who had brought desolation and death to Evangeline? Where the brother, to whom, but a few hours since, they had entrusted the unfortunate girl?

At the end of a fortnight he suddenly appeared among them. The news spread from one end of the Silver Isle to the other, and the islanders hastened to meet him. They gazed upon him with wonder. He had grown twenty years older in less than that number of days. His hair and beard were gray; his eyes were wild with inward suffering; his cheeks were furrowed with deep lines; and the corners of his lips were drawn in. He looked like one whose mind and body had received a shock from which it was impossible to recover.

The islanders deemed him crazed, for when they approached him, he shrank from them, and gazed at them, now vacantly as he would have gazed at strangers, now fiercely as he would have

gazed at enemies. They held consultation among themselves, and decided that it was necessary they should ask him certain questions, and that he should answer them. It might be that he was the only human being in whose power it was to give them information of the fate of Evangeline and her lover.

He strode past the houses in silence, and the islanders confronted and questioned him. He shook them off savagely, and took no notice of their words. He had come to the plains with a purpose in his mind, and he walked straight to the house of the priest.

“Land, and cattle, and grain, are mine,” he said to the priest, without preliminary. “Sit you down, and take reckoning of them from my lips.”

The priest obeyed him, as in the past all had done, and noted every particular furnished him by the unhappy man, who then in simple words dictated a deed of gift of all his property, to be disposed of in the service of the poor and of God. Even in the Silver Isle there were men less fortunate than their fellows.

“I come to you,” he said gloomily to

the priest, “because I know you to be a just man. I dispossess myself of all worldly wealth. Dispose of it in such a manner as may bring happiness and comfort to some who are deserving.”

“I will hold it,” said the priest gently, “in trust for you. In a little while, when your mind is calmer, you will resume your place among men, chastened by the grief which afflicts you.”

“I have lost my place, and can never regain it, shall never strive to regain it. You have known me from childhood, and have never known me to waver. I shall not waver now by a hair’s breadth”—he shuddered as the words escaped his lips, for they had been spoken by Evangeline when they stood together by the abyss which was now her grave—“from the resolution I have formed. I have sworn a solemn oath never, after I quit these plains, to visit them again, and never again to speak to mortal man. To break this oath would further imperil what is already imperilled—my soul! My business with mankind is at an end, and the words I speak to you this day are irrevocable. I deemed it right to come once

more among you, and make this disposition of my wealth. It is done, and I stand naked before heaven. Look upon me as a dead man, and waste no thought upon me."

He turned to go, but the priest with gentleness detained him.

"My son," he said, raising his hands, "let me bless you!"

"God forbid," cried the man, "that I should be so base as to bend my head! Priest, I am not worthy of a blessing; nor will man's prayers avail me. What remains for me to do rests only with myself."

Thus he would have departed without another word, but was not permitted. The chief men in the isle had formed themselves into a tribunal, and they demanded that he should appear before them. For a moment he debated whether he should obey the order; assuredly it depended upon himself, for it was scarcely likely that violence would be offered him if he refused; but he attended without resistance, and stood before the chiefs of the Silver Isle, erect as of old, with inscrutable eyes and haughty demeanour. They were assembled on a platform built

in the centre of an open space of ground, within which, at stated times of the year, athletic games were indulged in by the youth of the isle. Around the platform were gathered at least a couple of hundred of the islanders, men and women.

“Have you constituted yourselves my judges?” asked the brother; “and if so, for what am I to be judged?”

“We are your friends,” said the oldest man there, “as we have ever been, and we desire to soften, not to harden. We know your iron will, and how indomitable you are in your resolves. But no man is infallible and immaculate. Human judgment, under the influence of passion, is but a will-o’-the-wisp, leading us too often astray in matters of great moment; and if, suffering as you are suffering—for it is plain to all of us that your soul has been wrought—you have resolved to depart without a word of explanation regarding the events which have thrown our isle into mourning, I ask you in the name of justice to pause and reflect. You and your brother were ever just. You lived among us, honoured and revered. We submitted ourselves to you in matters

of life and death, and your will was law.
We look now for justice at your hands."

"How shall I render it?"

"By satisfying our reasonable demands.
Evangeline was our daughter, and her
honour is ours."

"She is pure and stainless."

"Who dare believe otherwise? Our
belief in her purity comes not only from
our hearts; it is in our conscience—a fixed
faith—as is our faith in God. But we
are also bound to her by a feeling more
selfishly human than our belief in a Here-
after and in the greatness of the Supreme.
Look around upon the women who have
followed you with eyes of love and
devotion as the embodiment of what is
noblest and best in our erring natures.
Your name was ever upon our lips; you
were held up as an example. Shall you
now, by an act which reason cannot justify,
destroy the heroic standard you have
created and set up in the isle? You will
see how closely it touches us, whose aim
it is to live honest lives. You will shake
our faith in human justice and manly
honour if you depart in silence from
amongst us. Evangeline, an orphan, was

left to our care ; she was our daughter, our sister, who grew to womanhood in our midst with a heart as pure as the heart of a lily. She drew us nearer to heaven by her sweetness. There beats not a heart in the isle that is not in mourning for Evangeline. We seek knowledge of her, and you alone can give it. If, as many suspect, there is between you and her a secret which may not be divulged, we do not press you to divulge it. We stand only within our rights."

"Demand them."

"Where is Evangeline ?"

"She is dead !"

Prepared as they were for it, the answer came upon them with the force of a new grief. Tears streamed down their faces, and sobs burst from many a bosom. Among them all the brother alone stood outwardly unmoved.

"Where is your brother ?" they presently asked.

"He is dead."

This news also shook them, and it was many moments before they asked,—

"Lived he on the morning he was to be united to Evangeline ?"

“He died,” was the reply, “before we met together in the church.”

“And Evangeline knew it not—had no forewarning of it?”

“She knew it not. She had no forewarning of it. Think of her as she was on that fatal morning, radiant and beautiful, animated by life’s sweetest promise, and ask yourselves whether it were possible she could have seen the cloud that was hanging over her.”

They derived a sad satisfaction from the knowledge that Evangeline’s lover had not been false to her. Their faith in him was restored; he had played no base part.

“We sought Evangeline,” said the spokesman of the tribunal, “and could not find her. We feared that she was dead, and desired to give her Christian burial.”

“It is impossible. She died for love, and cast herself from the heights into an unfathomable abyss. Her body is lost. Only her spirit remains.”

“On the altar of the church we found these tablets. They are yours. Knew you what she wrote on them?”

“I did not know.”

They gave them into his hands, and he read Evangeline’s last words to the islanders, and, as he read, his forced calmness forsook him. In a voice shaken by emotion, he said,—

“She accused herself falsely. It was the only false action of her life. No sin lies at her door. Be sure of that. I speak with certainty of knowledge, and shall not, dare not say more. There is a secret between me and her which may not be divulged. My presence here to-day is due to my resolve to rid myself of all worldly possessions, so that I may prepare my soul to meet its Maker—to meet Evangeline’s soul in the world beyond. I do not ask you to waste a gentle thought upon me: you can render me but one service—the service of forgetfulness. Blot me out from your memories from this day henceforth, for no man or woman in the isle shall ever again hear my voice—shall ever again stand face to face with me in friendly intercourse. Farewell for ever !”

With head sunk upon his breast, as though ashamed to meet the sunlight that shone upon the land, he descended the

platform and moved slowly away. They gave him ample room, and no man attempted to remonstrate with him or to persuade him to remain. Some terrible import, conveyed more by his manner than his words, caused them to shrink from him as from one accurst. Yet, in after times, a few, more tender than the rest, reproached themselves for not giving him one parting compassionate word or look.

He went from among them, and during the following few weeks built himself a hut in the most savage and inaccessible part of the range leading to the basin of snow. If, before he took up his residence there, that dangerous mount was avoided, it became now shunned by all, for in some mysterious way a suspicion of the truth stole into the minds of the islanders, which, growing stronger and stronger as they put together the links of circumstantial evidence, gradually settled into the belief that the wretch who lived upon that evil spot was a murderer, and had shed his brother's blood. With the weight of this conviction upon them, they were uncertain what course to pursue. Some talked of dragging him

from his hut, and accusing him of the crime ; and some, more violent, were for putting him to death without trial. These wild impulses were overruled by the elders of the isle.

“ Justice must not be outraged,” they said. “ What proofs have we ? and without proof, how can we condemn ? ”

They deliberated gravely, and called in the priest to their aid.

“ To punish upon suspicion,” he said, “ would be to add crime to crime. Only out of his own lips can he be proved guilty. He has sworn a solemn oath never again to speak word to mortal man, and you can as easily compel the mountain to speak as compel him to break his vow. Leave him to God. Is he not already suffering the tortures of a lost soul ? God be merciful to him, a sinner ! ”

So he was left in peace, to live his wretched, desolate life.

His hut being built, he set to work upon the task he had determined to perform. Cutting down a huge pine-tree, he dragged it, inch by inch, to a clearing in front of his dwelling. The labour was herculean, and no man but one possessed of

enormous physical strength and amazing inward sustaining power could have accomplished it. He lopped off the branches, and cleared the tree of all excrescences, and when the huge plain trunk was before him, he began to fashion it into the image of the Saviour stretched upon the Cross. The base of the tree, which was of astonishing girth, formed the apex of the design, and admitted of the carving of the outstretched arms. In storm and sunshine, by night and day, the man pursued his work. He lived upon roots and water, and passed through sickness and fever without abating one jot of his energy, in which, could it have been witnessed, would have been discerned the consuming strength of despair and remorse concentrated upon one supreme effort. The seasons changed ; the leaves grew green and withered, and again enjoyed their lives of youth and beauty, and the man never ceased from his labour. Year after year passed, and still the man was employed upon the task. His form could be dimly seen by the islanders in the plains and valleys, and after a time he was looked upon as something more than mortal. No man ven-

tured near him, but he dwelt in the minds of all. Women spoke of him with hushed voices, and children, looking up to the heights upon which he worked, quickly shut their eyes as though a blight would have fallen on them had they continued to gaze upon the strange shadow which never for a moment seemed to rest from its labour. At length, after a decade of years had passed, the priest of the Silver Isle called the old men around him, and announced his intention of visiting the sinner. His story was still fresh in the minds of the white-haired men, and although not one of them, with the exception of the priest, would have touched the sinner's hand in friendship, time had weakened their resentment against him.

"Terrible was his crime," said the priest, "terrible has been his self-inflicted punishment. It will be a work of mercy to pour oil upon his wounds."

They offered to accompany him, but he said he would go alone; it would be best. So, with their sanction, he departed, and when he returned, told them in a voice broken by emotion the story of his mission.

“ When he saw me walking up the mountain’s side towards him, he stood and watched me. I am old, and my limbs are feeble, but he made no effort to assist me ; he simply waited to learn my errand. I was supported by God, or I should never have reached his hut. So rugged is the road, and so beset with difficulty and danger, that I often had to creep upon my hands and knees for an hour or more, and to walk long distances on narrow precipitous paths where a slip of the foot would be fatal. I arrived at the end of my journey on the noon of the second day, and stood face to face with the man whose word for many years was law in our isle. Ah, my friends ! you would not recognize him, so changed is he. You will recall him as he was in the pride of his youth, a tall and handsome man, lithe and erect, with stalwart limbs, and eyes bright as an eagle’s. All this strength and beauty have vanished, as though they had never been. His body is but skin and bone, his hair is white, his hands are long and lean, his face is pitifully haggard, he is wasted almost to a shadow. Remembering what he was, remembering that I had nursed

him on my knee when he was an innocent child, my heart overflowed into my eyes as I gazed upon the wreck of grandeur and nobility. I held out my hand to him ; he kept his arms folded on his breast. I addressed him in words of kindness ; he replied not a word.

“‘If,’ I said, ‘your vow of silence weighs upon you, and prevents you from answering me, I absolve you from it. In God’s name, I absolve you. Through me, His priest, He bids you speak, He bids you pray.’

“I saw that he knew the meaning of my words. It would not have been strange had he, living for so long a time his terrible life of loneliness, lost all understanding of our language. But he had not ; he followed my words, but he made no response to them. I knelt and prayed. I prayed for him, a sinner ; in his name I made to God a confession of his crime ; for him and for myself I humbled myself before the Divine Throne, and supplicated for mercy and forgiveness. He did not, would not, kneel beside me ; he stood and listened in silence. For an hour I prayed and talked ; and the man

might have been made of stone, so unmoved did he appear. Faint with my exertions, I asked if he would permit me to enter his hut, and seek for food. He said neither yea nor nay. I entered his hut. Dear friends, my heart bled as I looked around. The walls of the hut are bare, the ground is stony, and there is no place but the earth to rest the weary limbs. During all these years, the man has lived in that drear habitation, with roots for his food, with stones for his bed, without complaining. What mortal can do to expiate his sin, this man has done. Surely he is forgiven! Upon the ground inside the hut I found some roots; and these were the only food his dwelling contained. I brought them out, and ate them in his presence, and taking a drinking cup roughly carved from wood, filled it with water from a rivulet close by, and drank. I thought it would soften him to see me partake with a willing heart of his hospitality. I did more. I took from my wallet some bread, and breaking it in two, I ate one piece, and offered him the other. He did not accept it, and I laid it within the door of his hut. So engrossed

was I in my endeavour to reach the heart of the suffering sinner that up to this time my eyes had not beheld the marvellous work upon which he has been engaged from the time he left us, and when I saw it I contemplated it with wonder. From a pine-tree, measuring in its present form not less than forty feet, he has fashioned the image of Our Saviour stretched upon the Cross, and has produced a work so beautiful and pathetic as must melt the heart of all who are permitted to gaze upon the sacred symbol. Aye, were his sin ever greater than it is, you would cry, looking upon this work of expiation, ‘God be merciful to him, a sinner!’ The Crown of Thorns, the Blood, the depiction of the Agony, are terrible and most exquisite in their truth to life and nature. Never in my life have I beheld so miraculous a conception, and I did not doubt that he intended to set it up in some suitable place, as a lasting memorial of his repentance. I addressed him again.

“‘When I last spoke to you,’ I said, ‘I offered to bless you, and you refused. At that moment I did not understand why you refused to accept the blessing of a

minister of God ; afterwards, it was clear to my mind. You deemed yourself not worthy. My son, let me bless you now !'

"I spoke in vain. Human effort was powerless to sap the fortress of silence in which his soul was entrenched. If in the depths of his nature he was stirred by my appeal, he showed no sign of it. I prepared in sorrow to depart, and as I turned to go I said,—

"'Fain would I leave some ray of light behind me. Not alone out of my own sense of duty did I come here to-day. The wish has long been in my mind, and before I put it into execution I called around me the chief men of the isle, old men who knew and loved you in the past. They urged me to see you, and offered to accompany me, but I thought it best to come unattended. It would be false if I were to tell you that you hold the place in their minds you held in the days gone by ; that can never be again. But in some undefinable way you live still in their hearts. You are to them as a son might be to a parent whom he has deeply wronged and sinned against, but to whom he is bound by ties of blood and early affection. On

the Sabbath day, in the old church yonder where you have so often knelt, we shall pray for you. Think of it, and kneel with us when the time for prayer arrives. We shall be together in spirit, and you may be grateful to know that you are not entirely shut out from the sympathies of men.'

"While I spoke these last words, I saw a moisture dim his eyes. He could not control the heaving of his breast, but his limbs obeyed his iron will. It gladdened me to perceive that the thought that those by whom he was once honoured did not hold his memory in complete abhorrence conveyed comfort to the wretched man. He uttered no word. In silence he watched my departure, and did not move while I was in sight. Dear friends, never shall I forget the misery of this man. Self-condemned, he lives his life of suffering, and no punishment his fellow-man could inflict could exceed that which he has inflicted upon himself. He is but the shadow of what he was, but his inward strength must be enormous. It cannot last. When his work is finished, when the marvellous figure he has fashioned is set up as a supplication for mercy at the Divine Throne, I foresee

that he will die. The vital power is only sustained by the strongest effort of an indomitable will. It will hold out until his task be done, and then the repentant sinner will yield up his soul to its Creator. On every Sabbath day we will pray for him and with him, for assuredly, although he made no response to my appeals, his heart will soften when he is once more alone with conscience and with God!"

From that time forth the sinner was held in pitying remembrance by the islanders, and it grew to be a kind of belief with them that the spirits of his brother and Evangeline were hovering over him through the weary hours, awaiting the time when he should rejoin them in the better world, to greet him with the words, "Brother, thou art forgiven!"

The priest had prophesied truly. The sinner's heart had been touched and softened by the merciful visit, and when the priest was out of sight the man cast himself upon the earth, and bedewed the bread upon his threshold with a blinding passion of tears. And when the Sabbath day arrived he knelt upon the stony ground, and joined his prayers with those of the

islanders, and thus became sympathetically connected with his kind. No farther efforts were made to intrude upon him, and the sinner continued his work until at length the first portion of his task was completed, and he looked down upon the marvellously carved figure of Christ upon the Cross. What remained for him to do was most dangerous, and seemed impossible of accomplishment ; but he had resolved within himself, and only death could stop him.

From the summit of the snow mountain, piercing its bosom, uprose a massive rock, which from the depths looked like a needle tapering to a point. But in fact its upper surface was flat, and not less than fifty feet in circumference. A foothold could be maintained upon the soft mass of snow which lay upon the thick and treacherous ice beneath, and both snow and ice would have to be cleared away before the surface of the rock could be laid bare. Herculean was the design, yet here it was that the sinner had resolved to rear the gigantic figure. This was the altar he had chosen upon which he would fix his symbol to the glory of God.

To drag his carved tree to the spot

occupied him full a year. Inch by inch it was moved, uninjured, up the heights, over the chasms, along the precipices. He was as tenderly careful of it as he could have been had it been living flesh and blood he was conveying to a destined goal. When the islanders became conscious of his purpose, they looked upon it as the scheme of a madman.

"It cannot be done," they said. "It is not in the power of mortal man."

"He will do it," said the priest of the Silver Isle.

It appeared as if the man were anxious to conceal his purpose from the knowledge of the islanders until it was achieved; or perhaps, knowing that at certain points he would be in full view of the inhabitants, he was desirous to avoid their continuous personal scrutiny. By whatever motive he was prompted, he now worked only in the night, and rested during the day. Thus a new and weird interest was added to the task, for when in the morning it was observed that a dangerous chasm had been safely crossed, or some great peril had been escaped, many believed that the man had been assisted by supernatural

power. Not all were mercifully inclined towards him; there were some whose hearts were still stern and relentless, and who, regarding the work as devoid of holiness, entertained the idea that it was being forwarded by the aid of evil spirits. As the weeks and the months passed by, the wonder of the islanders who watched the herculean labour, performed unaided by one human being, grew stronger and deeper. Without regard to season or weather, the man worked patiently on, and with each setting of the sun the inhabitants of the Silver Isle, old and young, would gather in clusters over the plains and valleys, to watch his progress. Whatever their own immediate troubles and joys, in the midst of their sorrow and gladness, this man was not entirely absent from their minds. He was but a speck upon the mountain side, an insignificant atom amid Nature's terrible and beautiful creations, but there was a pathos in his slow and weary toil that touched the hearts of those who were tenderly inclined. It grew to be a custom to pray inwardly for him, that his offering might be successfully raised, and his sin wiped out. Their

imaginations did not deceive them when they cried that they saw blood upon his hands and feet, for not a day passed that his flesh was not torn by the sharp rocks.

Once he fell near the edge of a precipice, and his symbol upon him, and it was not until hours after the rising of the sun that he succeeded in extricating himself. Again and again the islanders expected that he would be hurled into an abyss, thousands and thousands of feet down, to lie there till the Archangel sounded his trumpet on the Judgment Day. Mothers, waking up in the night, would see in the darkness the phantom of this man toiling, with ropes about his shoulders; would see a white and pitiful face and marks of bleeding feet upon the rocks, and would murmur, as they pressed their babes to their bosoms, "God pity and pardon him, and keep my child from crime!"

So the work went on until the sacred figure rested upon the highest surface of the fatal mount. Then the flat table of the rock had to be cleared of ice and snow, and a foundation dug in it for the symbol to rest in. With unwearying patience this was done, and by slowly building beneath

the upper part of the symbol a pile of stones, it was raised into such a position that by a great effort it could be slipped into the rocky bed prepared for it, and there fixed for ever as a sign.

On a Saturday night in September, when the lovely autumn colours were coming into the leaves, all was ready for the final effort. It had become known that the sinner had nearly completed his self-allotted task, and that the Sabbath sun would shine upon his appeal to the Divine Heart for mercy and forgiveness. The night was intensely dark ; but the excitement in the Silver Isle was so great that none who were in health would retire to rest. The islanders assembled on a plain from which, on sunny days and moonlight nights, a clear view of the snow-clad peak could be obtained, and prepared to wait for the rising of the sun. Those among them who remembered the day on which their beloved Evangeline stood in the church waiting for her bridegroom, recalled the circumstances of that fatal time, and saw with their mind's eye the beautiful girl arrayed in the bridal dress which proved her shroud. They spoke in whis-

pers ; they moved softly about, and when they smiled, their smiles were sad ; gentle thoughts only reigned in their minds. Slowly the minutes passed until midnight came ; women wept and strong men trembled. The silences were broken by a gasp, or by a cry of pity springing from the depths of an overwrought soul, or by the involuntary utterance of a short and pitiful prayer. A dread mysterious influence was at work in the solemn thraldom of that awful night. It stirred the hair of men and women ; it impressed them with their littleness, their helplessness, their insignificance ; it made them humble and afraid. They stretched out their hands, and drew closer to each other, husband to wife, brother to sister, children to their mothers. They derived comfort from personal contact ; it was in some sense a protection against the evil spirits which they believed were contending with the angels for the soul of the sinner. Family ties that had been weakened in affection became suddenly strong again ; and had two enemies stood side by side, an uncontrollable instinct would have caused them to clasp hands in friendship. Darker and

darker grew the night. Shadows glided up and down the mountain sides, and floated upwards from the depths, pregnant with mysterious meaning. Not a sound, not a breath, not a movement escaped the islanders that was not in sympathy with the lonely sinner labouring on the snow-clad peak. Straining their eyes thitherward, their fevered fancies created phantasmagoria which they believed to be real. Black clouds upon the lofty rock were thought to represent the forms of the sinner and his symbol. Now he was putting the finishing touches to his work of expiation ; now he was kneeling, with his head bowed down in prayer ; now he was looking upward with tear-stained face, and his arms raised in supplication to heaven. The islanders paused not to consider that, with a bright light shining on the snowy heights, he would have appeared even to the strongest sight as a mere speck upon the horizon, whose movements it would have been scarcely possible to distinguish. All things were possible on such a night. It was a time for miracles.

“ Hark ! ” said one. “ Did you not hear a cry ? ”

Many were ready to aver that a cry from the mountain top had floated downward to the plain. But had such a cry been uttered, it was incredible it could have reached their ears. Reason would not have convinced them. They were the slaves of imagination,—

Among them was the priest who had visited the sinner. Ever and anon his voice was heard in exhortation,—

“Terrible was his sin. Terrible is his expiation. Let the memory of the awful deed remain for ever in this dear island home as a sign, as a warning. If temptation assail thee, drive it forth! This sinner has done all that mortal man could do; his repentance is sincere; he has washed his sin with tears of blood. His bloody footsteps mark the path which leads to the holy work he has performed. Christ be merciful to him!”

And all the congregation murmured,—

“Christ be merciful to him—and to me, a sinner!”

The snow mountain lay in the eye of the east, and in the early morning the sun was wont to bathe the white expanse with rosy light. So beautiful in this aspect did

it look that it seemed to belong to another and more lovely world. As the night progressed, the watchers grew more excited and eager.

“Is it not time for the sun to rise?” some asked.

“Not till another hour has passed,” replied the more patient ones.

Shortly after these words were spoken, mutterings of a storm were heard, and it soon burst over the land. No rain fell upon the plains and valleys, but the lightning played over the mountain, and the thunder rolled down its rugged sides. Fiercer and fiercer grew the storm until it attained the most terrible proportions. It shook the earth to its foundations; in the memory of living man dwelt not so fearful an experience. But terrible as it was, it did not divert the thoughts of the islanders from the sinner who had drawn them together. The storm was for him; he was there upon the mountain top, he and his sin, battling with it. God was speaking to him in fire and thunder, and demons and angels were fighting for his soul. Which would conquer? As they gazed upwards at the gloomy heights, a vivid flash of lightning gashed the dark

bosom of the sky ; the thunder rolled more fiercely ; the heavens appeared to open ; and a straight line of fire, suddenly descending from the very heart of the unseen world, stabbed with fatal light the man and his work of repentance, which in that awful moment were hurled into the abyss yawning beneath them.

A cry of horror rose from the throats of the islanders, and in the midst of the dense darkness that followed no man dared to speak, so appalling was the impression produced by the event. The storm abated, and died away in sobs ; and presently a faint light dawned in the sky. The light grew stronger, clearer. A hazy, golden mist rolled over the snow mountain, and when its peaks were tipped with the fire of the rising sun, the islanders saw no sign of the sinner and his symbol. God had rejected his work, and had declared that not in this world should the sinner be allowed to work out the full measure of his punishment !

From that day forth, the mountain was looked upon as accurst, and all men avoided it !

THE END OF THE PROLOGUE.

THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

MAUVAIN TAKES REFUGE IN THE SILVER ISLE.

THE progress of time had no softening effect upon the evil reputation of the accursed mount. For more than a hundred years no human sound had proceeded from the deserted heights ; shadowless forms, spirits wrapt in a deadly mantle of silence, held dominion there. The fair white snow-land gleamed as beautifully now in the eye of the sun as it had done thousands of years ago, and it would have been difficult for a stranger to believe that a tragedy in which God's judgment had been so fearfully demonstrated could ever have occurred upon its stainless bosom. But the story of the crime and its punishment formed the blackest page in the history of the Silver Isle, and the peaceful aspect of the mount did not lessen the abhorrence in which it was held by the

islanders. Even now, although six generations of men had passed away since the awful night upon which the destruction of the sinner and his symbol was accomplished, only one man's shadow fell upon the rugged paths leading to the basin of eternal snow.

The man was Ranf the Deformed.

In the year 1830 of the present century an unusual circumstance occurred in the Silver Isle. The white sails of a schooner were seen within a few miles of the shore. A visit from the outer world was an event so rare that the islanders watched with deep interest the movements of the schooner. Children ran to the hillocks, and gazed with delight upon the snowy wings of the sea-bird; women also experienced a feeling of pleasure in observing the graceful dip and rise of the vessel. Their pleasure was not shared by the older residents of the isle, who silently asked each other whether the schooner came as friend or foe. The question was soon answered. The schooner anchored in the bay; in the evening a boat rowed towards the shore, and four sailors and a landsman leaped upon the beach. Two chests were

in the boat, and these were brought to land, and placed on the beach, high up, out of reach of the tide. This done in silence, the sailors, obeying the instructions of the landsman, returned to the boat, and rested on their oars. The man who remained was roughly attired, and for a moment or two he stood silently regarding a group of islanders who were watching his proceedings. Presently he approached them and addressed them in courteous tones,—

“I am flying for my life,” he said. “I come to you for shelter and protection.”

His demeanour was so unaffectedly composed as to appear to some to afford a contradiction to the serious import of his words; but it was evident to the more experienced that he was in earnest.

In front of the group stood one of the magistrates of the isle, known as Father Sebastian.

“This is not a sanctuary,” said Father Sebastian; “it is a land whose inhabitants desire to live in peace with all men. If you are flying for your life, you have committed crime.”

“Not so,” rejoined the stranger in a light tone; and it was apparent from his

speech and bearing that he was a gentleman, despite his common dress ; “unless it be a crime to have opinions. It is one of the misfortunes of our family. I have played a part in a too turbulent civilization ; having opinions, I expressed them ; having the honour of an ancient name to uphold, I upheld it. I simply happen to belong to the party that is out of power, and, being down instead of up, I am naturally disgusted with the world until my turn come again. I seek the security that is to be found in forgetfulness ; in this I follow the footsteps of my grandfather, who fifty years ago, under precisely similar circumstances, sought refuge here and obtained it. He did not abuse your hospitality. Our name is Mauvain.”

“Your name is known,” said Father Sebastian. “I am old enough to have a dim remembrance of your grandfather, who, after he left this isle, sent us remembrances which we still possess.”

“Our family were ever grateful,” said Mauvain with a bow. “In my boyhood I heard my grandfather speak in terms of admiration of your ways and mode of life ; therefore,” he added, with a touch of

pleasant sophistry, “your virtues are to blame for my intrusion. These papers will prove that I am the person I represent myself to be.” He paused to allow Father Sebastian to examine the papers, and then said, “I ask permission to remain here till I can return to my native land.”

He held out his hand, which Father Sebastian accepted, and thus Mauvain was made free of the isle.

Thereafter, from time to time, a brig came to the isle, bringing Mauvain letters and newspapers which he read with eagerness, and bringing also implements and tools of use to the islanders, which Mauvain employed in the way of barter and exchange. By these means he became the owner of land, and he was soon looked upon by the islanders as one of themselves. He had already told them that he possessed opinions; in addition, he possessed ideas, and being of an energetic, restless nature, he strove to make them popular. In this he was unsuccessful. The islanders would have none of his crotchets. The Silver Isle was ruled by wise men, who, born in simplicity, and living happily and contentedly in that state, were anxious

to avoid disturbing elements. Especially were they anxious that the minds of their young men should not be agitated by wild theories. But Mauvain was by nature dogmatic and masterful, and it needed a strong remonstrance before he could be made to relinquish the idea of making their wills the slaves of his.

"Let be, Mauvain, let be," said Father Sebastian. "We are the best judges of whether we need this or that. Our fore-fathers left us an inheritance of contentment, which we in our turn desire to leave to our children. We are in harmony with each other, and we account indolence a vice. Brought up in virtue and industry, our young men and women live their lives in peace, and worship God. What changes have come upon our isle have come naturally, and we would not have it otherwise. Hothouses are not to our taste. Friend Mauvain, keep your new-fangled notions to yourself, and do not strive to turn us from our ways. It is no reproach to us if we do not move as quickly as the country in which you have lived. Setting our experiences against yours, the advantage, I take it, is on our side. If

things are well with men, it is a misfortune if they are tempted to believe that they are sent into the world to set every wrong thing right. Each to do his best in the small circle in which he moves—that is both philosophy and religion : and it is our aim. We are not savages, as you see ; we have a regard for cleanliness and godliness ; we have enough for our spiritual and temporal needs ; and, friend Mauvain, if you have not already learned it, you are old enough to learn it now—enough is enough.”

Mauvain shrugged his shoulders. “ Make a troglodyte of me,” he said with a slight sneer, “ or teach me to crawl like the crab.”

But he had the grace to recognize that it would be a breach of hospitality to continue his endeavours to force his opinions upon the islanders. Condemned by circumstances to remain among them, he could not pass his days in idleness. For a time he shut himself up with his books and newspapers, but they were not sufficient to satisfy his active temperament. He strove to lighten the weary hours by writing something in the form of memoirs,

but it was not long before he flung away the pen. Then the beauty of the isle drew him forth, and he wandered over its length and breadth. "Searching for fairies," he said sportively. He found neither fairy nor malignant spirit, nor did he chance upon an Aladdin's cave, although the isle was prolific in rare surprises. But he made a substantial discovery. In a wild gulch in an uninhabited part of the isle he found traces of silver ore. The land round about was waste land, and he purchased it of the commonwealth, paying for it in ploughs and harrows of improved design. He prosecuted his search, and hired men to work for him in the gulch during the winter season. They unearthed a rich mine, and in the spring Mauvain and his workmen returned to the centre of population, bringing with them some sacks of silver ore. He exhibited the treasure exultantly to the islanders, and told them it was freislebenite, and contained antimony, lead, sulphur, and silver. They smiled at his enthusiasm, and said they preferred golden grain. The ore, however, was melted, and a large yield of silver was obtained. It

was of little value to Mauvain or to any one else on the isle; but Mauvain continued to work the mine intermittently, chiefly for the purpose of employing his time. It could scarcely have been for gain, for he was otherwise rich in his own right in the country to which he was not free to return.

But the release came at last, and after the lapse of a dozen years he received the welcome news that he might return in safety to his native land. His face brightened with joy, and yet, as he drew a deep breath, and extended his arms to embrace the spirit of liberty, he felt a pang of regret. Yesterday the isle had been a prison; to-day it was fair and sweet in his eyes. Yesterday it was a cage, to-day it was a garden. How bright were the clouds; how fragrant the air; how beneficent the earth! Never in his dreams had he imagined a spot upon earth so calm, so peaceful, so free from care! In the pretty house he had built for himself in the Silver Isle, he received from an old-time friend all the particulars of the fortunate change in affairs which had restored him to his position in the world. It seemed as if he

would never be done with his questions, so eager was he to hear all that had passed in his absence. He inquired with keen interest after such and such men whom he had known, and he learned that some were dead, some disgraced, some at the top of the ladder, some crawling in the gutters.

"Ah, well," said he, "'tis battledore and shuttlecock; I'll play the battledore for the future, be sure of that."

After women also he inquired, and learnt who led and who followed, who were sought after, who laughed at, and what was the character of the imperious beauty who reigned in the world of fashion. The most popular idol was one whom he had nursed on his knee before the tide of his fortunes had changed for the worse; she was a child at that time—docile, meek, obedient—now she was a woman, haughty, proud, capricious. She, a patrician, and another, who had risen from vile depths, ruled the world of fashion between them. A smile rested upon Mauvain's handsome lips as he listened and dreamt of future conquests. While the conversation was proceeding he unlocked a chest, and

producing therefrom a suit of the finest clothes, decked himself out as became his rank and station. With the delight of a child he contemplated the reflection of his fine feathers in the mirror.

“I am going to live once more,” he thought, and as he sprinkled a delicate perfume over his clothes, he made a vow to drink the cup of pleasure to the last drop. Brave and vain; clear-sighted and dogmatic; nice in small points of honour, and unscrupulous in his observance of moral obligations; capable of reasoning truthfully upon the passing circumstance, and apt at the same time to applaud himself extravagantly for his critical insight; now haughty and now pleasantly familiar; generous in money matters; ready to laugh at questions of morality where the gratification of his desires was concerned, but most jealous in that respect towards those who were allied to him—this was Mauvain, who had one law for himself and another for his neighbour.

When, his toilet being completed, he stepped from his house and presented himself to the islanders, they saw a gentle-

man of rank, attired in silk and lace, with a sword hanging at his side. It was a metamorphosis. The man was there, but not the man with whom they had been familiar. A dainty handkerchief was in his hand, which he waved lightly in the air; a jewelled snuff-box, too, although he disliked snuff. Fortunate, therefore, that the box was empty. The life he had led on the isle had so greatly benefited him that he looked younger than he had done on the day, a dozen years ago, he first appeared among them. The surprise his appearance excited pleased him, and he inclined his head this way and that, as though he were a king receiving the congratulations of his subjects; and as he bowed with a superb and affable air, he daintily regaled his nose with pinches of nothing from his jewelled snuff-box. The islanders, somewhat awed by his grand manner, presented him with small tokens of affection, and expressed their regret at his departure.

“Regret,” said Father Sebastian gravely, “which I hope is mutual. Your sojourn here has done you no harm.”

“I am younger at heart,” responded

Mauvain gaily, “and older in wisdom. You have taught me much worth learning, and I fear you must sometimes have considered me ungrateful. Yes; I feel that I have been happy. This isle contains the true elixir of life, and those qualities which best sweeten it, gentleness and content, grow like sweet roses in the summer air. You might ask, ‘Why fly from us, then?’ It would ill become me were I to say that a man is not an ox, whose only ambition it is to eat succulent grass and breathe fresh air. More graceful to say that there are also roses in my own land whose perfume I long to inhale, flowers which seem, although they may not be, as bright. Do not think unkindly of me. Our ambitions, our hopes, our desires, are widely apart. That the happier life is yours I do not dispute, but no man can resist his star, and mine shines yonder, across the sea, where already I see the lights and hear the music of familiar voices. Adieu, my friends. What property I have in this isle is in your charge until I, or some other authorized by me, appears to claim it. I go to take up the broken thread of life, and it will be pleasant to me to

feel that I am still linked to the land which has sheltered me for so many years."

He spoke with emotion which, for the moment, was sincere. The enforced repose he had enjoyed filled him now with gratitude, in which was curiously mingled a gentle glow of self-satisfaction. "Strange inconsistency of human nature," he muttered, "that we can only enjoy the past in the present!" So, with goodwill on both sides, he and his island friends bade farewell.

In papers that were found after his departure the disposition of his property was clearly set forth. He requested the islanders to make what use they pleased of his house, which was one of the largest and prettiest in the isle, and asked whoever occupied it to keep the grounds and gardens around it in good order. As he had told them, all his property was to be considered theirs, with but one reservation, which referred to the silver-mine in the gulch. In the event of its being worked, he desired that his proprietary rights should be recognized by a royalty of one-tenth portion of the silver it produced,

which was to be stored until it was claimed by himself or his heirs. The islanders accepted the trust, and faithfully observed the conditions attached to it.

CHAPTER II.

TO THE SILVER ISLE COMES AN EVANGELINE
WHOSE LIPS ARE MUTE.

FROM the period of Mauvain's departure, the isle was visited, about once every year, by a brig, of which it was understood that Mauvain was the owner. The captain brought with him pretty oddments from the troublous world whose thirsts and fevers had not yet touched the lovely land in which the spirit of peace reigned supreme; and when he found that these ornaments were not in favour, he brought agricultural implements and exchanged them for skins and horns of cattle. But his ambition was not to be bounded by these articles of barter and exchange.

“ You have,” he said to the islanders, “ what is more valuable to me than horn and hides.”

“ What is that? ” they asked.

“Silver.”

This opened their eyes, and they availed themselves of Mauvain’s permission to work the mine, and used the treasure for the common good, with sense and wisdom, never failing to set aside a just tenth for Mauvain or his heirs. The captain gained his end, but it vexed him to the soul that he could not tempt the people to trade for gew-gaws, in which lay larger profits for himself.

Casting about for legitimate roads to trade, the captain heard the story of Evangeline and the two brothers, and he straightway suggested that it would be a rare achievement to beautify the great market-place of the Silver Isle with a marble statue of the girl, the memory of whom had not faded from the minds of the inhabitants.

“See you now,” said the captain, “for a thousand ounces of silver I will bring you an image which shall be the wonder of the isle—a life-size image of Evangeline, in pure white marble. For another two hundred ounces I will bring you a pedestal of veined stone, upon which it shall stand. Give me a picture of the maid, and make

her as fair and beautiful as you please. I will stake my life your picture shall not outrival in grace my statue of stone. It shall do all but speak."

They fell in gladly with the captain's offer, the bargain was made, and their most skilful artist drew a picture of Evangeline, taking for his model the fairest maid in the isle. He could not improve upon her, for flesh and blood and bone were never seen in more graceful conjunction than in the Silver Isle. There were women there as beautiful as Venus, and men as graceful as Apollo. The strange part of it was that, although the women knew they were fair, not all their heads were turned by the knowledge.

I would not have you believe they were all saints. There were sinners among them, as you shall find.

The captain took away the picture, and upon his next visit brought with him as beautiful a statue in pure white marble as genius in its first spiritual strength could produce. The girl was represented in her happiest mood. Her limbs were perfectly moulded, her feet were bare, her head was slightly inclined forward. A smile was on

her lips, her right hand was raised, and her forefinger crooked towards her ear, as if in the act of listening. That the face was not a reproduction of the picture drawn by the island artist was of small account ; it was most perfect in its beauty. The sculptor had worked with the soul of an artist.

The satisfaction of the islanders was expressed in words and looks of admiration, and the captain brought to bear the cunning of the world's ways, not entirely discarding truth in his scheming words.

“The artist who fashioned this figure,” he said, “is a young man who will become famous in the world—one who loves his art better than money. That should not be taken advantage of—it is a scurvy trick to pay a man half value for his labour. Had you seen this young sculptor with the figure growing beneath his chisel, you would have been amazed at his enthusiasm. He worked day and night, like a man in a fever of love, as though he expected when it was finished to see it burst into life, throw its arms round his neck, and press its

warm lips of flesh and blood to his. It almost broke his heart to part with it. I speak the truth when I say that it occupied him more than double the time he expected. It was a bad bargain for him when I fixed the price at a thousand ounces."

"It is a noble work," said the purchasers; "we will pay him what you consider just."

By which piece of roguery the captain profited to the tune of three hundred ounces of silver.

The statue was set up in the market-place, and the silver weighed out and paid, and all parties were well content. Thus matters went on for a few years, and then the schooner unexpectedly made its appearance, and brought with it another kind of cargo than that to which the islanders were accustomed.

It was early autumn, and the men and women were in the fields, singing over their work. The air was sweet with the fragrance of new-mown hay.

Some children playing on the beach stopped in the midst of their play, and drew nearer to the edge of the waves to

watch the progress of a boat which was approaching the shore. In it were two sailors, rowing, and a young man who leant back, and played with the water, letting it run lazily through his fingers. A spell of indolence was upon him, for he stepped languidly from the boat, and coming among the children, did not speak for a little while. The children, full of curiosity, and not afraid, took note in their quiet wondering way of the rings the young man wore upon his fingers, of the gold chain which hung across his waist-coat, of the diamond pin in his scarf, of the jewelled cane which he did not seem to have the strength to twirl between his fingers.

“Children,” he said presently, “is this Lotus Land?”

Not understanding the question, they did not answer him, and he continued in his soft melodious voice,—

“I can imagine a harder lot than to be condemned to live within this prison of sweetness. A wood-fairy might take pity on a mortal, and offer him the shelter of her bower. Children, if you are not sea-born and understand the language I speak,

tell me if I have not lost my way across the sea. This is the Silver Isle? Bright eyes and intelligent nods are a sufficient answer. There are a few grown-up persons here, I suppose. The isle is not peopled by children only, who never grow bigger or older? You, for instance, my little maid, have a father and mother?"

"Oh, yes," replied the child, "and father is in the fields working."

"Take me to him."

She slipped her hand in his, and he looked down, amused, upon her pretty face, and submitted to be led to the fields where a number of the islanders were at work. The pleasant aspect of the scene impressed him deeply, the people were so different from the hinds who did such work in his own country.

"Arcadia!" he murmured.

"Here is father," said the girl, as a tall sun-burnt man moved towards the stranger.

"I have landed from the schooner," said the new-comer, "and have brought a charge which I am to deliver to one Father Sebastian, if he be alive."

"Father Sebastian is alive," said the islander. "From whom come you?"

“ From Mauvain.”

“ That is sufficient ; rest here awhile, and we will send for Father Sebastian. Our children shall bring you some fruit.”

The new-comer threw himself upon the tumbled hay, and took note dreamily of the happy life by which he was surrounded.

CHAPTER III.

TO THE SILVER ISLE COMES A NEW EVANGELINE WHOSE LIPS ARE ANIMATE.

A soft languor stole over his senses. He was in the state between sleeping and waking, when one is not sure whether he is in a living world or in a world of shadows. At such a time what is most extravagant is accepted as most probable; there is nothing to wonder at in the strangest contradictions. Reason sleeps; imagination reigns in its most fantastic forms. If the enchanted mortal lies in a darkened room, where palpable objects are shut from his sight, his mind is dominated by phantasms which have no prompting from what is passing around him. To the lover comes a sweet and gracious face, which represents the light and loveliness of the earth; to the miser, a suit of diamonds, in which he sits and gloats,

while troops of gnomes empty sacks of gold at his feet ; to the widowed heart a dear form, lost to her for ever, which says, with radiant smile, “ I live ; ” to the poet, a star, which kisses him, and to which he talks as to a beloved comrade.

The new visitor to the Silver Isle lay under a different form of enchantment. The full sunlight was upon him, he was surrounded by breathing, moving life, and the shape in which it presented itself to him was inspired by a nature essentially dreamy and poetical. Gazing before him with half-closed eyes, every object that met his sight was invested with an air of delicious unreality. The clouds appeared to be thousands of miles away, and the human workers in the fields, with the landscape beyond, were wrapt in a hazy mist. The delusion extended to the voices of the reapers ; words that were spoken within a few yards of him came to his ears now as though from an illimitable distance, and now quite close, with a lullaby resembling the soft murmuring of a leafy wood. Colour and sound were in perfect harmony with the restfulness of time and scene. The dreamer yielded unre-

sistingly to the sensuous spell, and believed himself to be enjoying a foretaste of eternity.

Thus he lay until the messenger who had been sent for Father Sebastian returned with the message that the magistrate was in the market-place, and desired to see the stranger there.

Unwillingly he rose, and followed the man over the lower slopes of the hills, which were dotted with clusters of pretty houses, built in various styles to suit the tastes of the residents. Every house was surrounded by a verandah, and was embosomed in a garden of flowers. The eye was refreshed at every turn by evidences of refinement and simplicity. The roads were well kept, the hedges were beautiful in their variety, being formed of may and wild roses, holly, sweet barberry, and privet; and the air was impregnated now with the sweet perfume of syringa floating from dusky avenues of trees, now with the more delicate fragrance wafted from distant fields of lavender.

“Mauvain was right,” mused the stranger. “When a man is surfeited with the sweets or disgusted with the buffets of the world,

this is the land in which to spin out what remains of the days of his life."

Father Sebastian was in the market-place; in a few days the autumn games were to be held, and men were working under his direction, fixing the flags and poles and bushes, and preparing the ground for one of the great fêtes of the year.

"Yonder is Father Sebastian," said the messenger.

An old man, whose white hair flowed to his shoulders, advanced to the stranger and saluted him.

"I regret," he said, "you should have had the trouble to come to me, but I could not leave my workmen."

"The gain is mine," said the stranger; "it has given me the opportunity of seeing something of your beautiful isle; though I should have been content to dream the day away in the fields with your haymakers."

"We live a very practical life," said Father Sebastian; "our people are not dreamers. You come from Mauvain?"

"Yes. 'Harold,' said Mauvain to me, a short month ago, 'you are wearied with the world—'"

“ You ! ” exclaimed Father Sebastian, interrupting the speaker, whose age could not have exceeded twenty-five years. “ So young a man, already wearied with life ! ”

“ It surprises you,” replied Harold languidly ; “ but have you ever asked yourself whether there is anything in life worth caring for ? ”

“ I am thankful to say I have never been brought to that pass.”

“ I have—many times. Life is made up of pleasure and pain, in neither of which is there much variety. One kind is much like another kind, and the sensations they produce are always the same. It is good that existence has a natural limit. In such a land as this a man might accept without much misgiving the gift of immortality, but in the busy world it would be an awful purgatory. ‘ Harold,’ said Mauvain to me, ‘ you are wearied, exhausted ; excitement has been bad for you. You need repose ; I can offer it to you. I am in want of a friend to execute a delicate commission for me. I select you as that friend ’—(it is Mauvain’s way to take things for granted when he wants a favour done)—‘ I select

you as that friend, and, in obliging me, you shall oblige yourself. You are for ever sighing and searching for simplicity ; I will send you to an isle where its spirit dwells.' He explained the commission to me, and I accepted it. I must do Mauvain the justice to admit that his description of the Silver Isle was not strained. His eloquent words stirred even my sluggish blood."

"We hold Mauvain in high regard. Is he well—satisfied—happy?"

"He is well. As to being satisfied and happy—those are questions a man must answer for himself."

"You speak wisely. What is the nature of Mauvain's commission?"

"Human. At least, one half of it is. The other half probably had its origin in the lower regions. You do not understand me? This letter may help you."

The letter he handed to Father Sebastian ran as follows:—

"SIR,—By the hands of my friend, Harold, a scapegrace, whom I beg you to welcome, for his own sake, I send you a trust which I ask you to accept in kindly remembrance of one who owes you already

a debt of gratitude he can never repay. By so doing you will confer upon me an inestimable obligation. I may one day come to thank you in person for your kindness. Whatever expenses may be attendant upon the charge I confide to you can be defrayed out of the property standing in my name in the Silver Isle. Repay yourselves, I pray; but the obligation will remain, and will ever be gratefully remembered by your faithful friend,

“MAUVAIN.”

Father Sebastian read the letter aloud, and said,—

“Mauvain’s letter explains as little as your words the nature of his commission, but what he sends us will be received and welcomed, and will be faithfully cared for until it is reclaimed. The commission, so far as I can make out, is in the form of a consignment. Is that so?”

“It is so.”

“Have you brought it ashore?”

“No; it is in the schooner.”

“If you will bring it, we will receive it from your hands, and give you quittance for it.”

A smile crossed Harold's lips.

"I need no receipt. It can speak for itself."

As he turned to go, his eyes fell upon the statue of Evangeline, which stood in the centre of the market-place.

"Have you sculptors in the isle?" he asked.

"We have men who employ their leisure in the study of the art," replied Father Sebastian, "but none able to produce such a figure as that."

"It is to be hoped not," said Harold, shrugging his shoulders, "for never was the human form so travestied. The composition of the figure is unutterably bad, the expression most vile, the limbs and features entirely out of proportion."

"Your critical judgment," said Father Sebastian warmly, "is sadly in error. The figure is faultless, and full of grace; it is the work of a young sculptor in Mauvain's land—"

"Very young, I should say," interrupted Harold.

"And is most exquisite," continued Father Sebastian, "in composition and detail. It is not alone the work of a man's

hand, it is the work of a man's soul, and were the artist here we should be proud to do him honour."

"In what way?" asked Harold listlessly. "Would you give him a wreath, or fill his ears with empty phrases? That is how genius is rewarded over the water. Or they wait until the man dies in poverty, and then they erect a statue over his grave. I hope the sculptor who moulded and cut this figure, vile as it is, was substantially rewarded for it in his lifetime."

"Thirteen hundred ounces of silver was the price he was paid for his work."

"Little enough; I hope he got it. There is so much roguery in the world that one is never sure. Now I look at the figure more closely, I discern some merit in it. But if the sculptor ever thought he could attain perfection, he was a fool for his pains. Of course you know the name of the artist?"

"We endeavoured," said Father Sebastian, "to obtain it from the captain who took the commission from us, but he said the sculptor stipulated that his name should not be mentioned."

“The modest fool.”

“Nay, eccentric, mayhap,” said Father Sebastian, “but he did not desire entire obscurity. Here you see is an H cut in the marble.”

“It might stand for Harold,” said Mauvain’s friend, “in which case Harold might stand for an idiot. But the day is waning. I must bring you Mauvain’s charge before sundown.”

He made his way at once to the schooner, and in due time returned with the cargo consigned by Mauvain to the inhabitants of the Silver Isle: a child scarcely three years of age, and a man, deformed and ungainly, not more than four feet in height. The child gazed about in delight, seeking what was beautiful, and prepared to enjoy it. The dwarf gazed about in distrust, seeking for what was hidden beneath the surface, and prepared to condemn it, unseen.

The islanders were but little prepared for such a consignment, and their looks expressed their astonishment. One half of the charge entrusted to them by Mauvain was of metal so attractive as from its own grace and beauty to ensure a welcome;

of the other half not so much could be said.

“What kind of being is this,” thought the islanders, as the dwarf stood among them, peering this way and that, “and what kind of soul can live in such a body?”

“What kind of men and women are these?” thought the dwarf. “Like their fellows, I doubt not. Fair face—false heart.”

Thus at once was engendered between them a feeling of antagonism.

“I told you,” said Harold, who had observed, with an amused smile, the manner in which Mauvain’s trust was received, “that the consignment could speak for itself. It is veritably human in shape. It cries when it is hurt, and laughs when it is tickled.”

The misshapen dwarf took no apparent heed of Harold’s words; he stood regarding the islanders with a frown upon his face.

“Well?” he questioned of Father Sebastian.

“What would you have, friend?” inquired Father Sebastian.

“Civility.”

“We have spoken no word concerning you.”

“Not with your tongues; but with your eyes. You received a letter from Mauvain. Has it not explained matters?”

“Not fully. To speak frankly—”

“Aye, do. It will be agreeable—and novel.”

“We are surprised, and we would make sure.”

“What surprises you?” sneered the dwarf. “My shape? It surprised me when I first understood it and compared it with other men’s. And of what would you make sure? Whether this little maid and I come from Mauvain?”

“Yes, we would be assured of that.”

“Leave my evidence out. Crooked body, crooked words. Speak you, sculptor Harold, and say whether we are here under false pretence or not.”

“This man and this child,” said Harold, “represent the delicate commission I was entrusted with, and promised to execute. Of one part of it I am glad to be rid; the other I could put up with a while longer. You seem not to be prepared for such

a consignment. It will grieve Mauvain to the heart—”

“ Eh ? ” interrupted the dwarf, “ where will it grieve him ? ”

“ To the heart,” continued Harold, with imperturbable good-humour, “ if he finds there is any difficulty.”

“ There shall be no difficulty,” said Father Sebastian, after a short pause. “ Leave this singularly assorted pair. We are content.”

“ Not so am I,” exclaimed the dwarf : “ there is something more to be said. The little maid is in my care. Learn for yourselves whether the association is repugnant to her.” He dropped the pretty hand he had held in his, and he stepped back a few paces from the child. She looked at him inquiringly, then ran towards him, and with a confiding motion placed her arms round his neck. He smoothed her hair, and gently patted her cheek. “ We do not stay here without a fair and honest welcome.”

“ How shall we call you, friend ? ”

“ As others call me. Ranf.”

“ We are not desirous of harbouring any that are not of our kith and kin ; but

Mauvain has a claim upon us, which we are glad to recognize. You are free of the Silver Isle, you and your little maid. We give you both honest welcome. Are you content now?"

"Aye—as far as my nature goes."

Father Sebastian stooped and kissed the child. "What is your name, pretty one?"

"Evangeline."

The reply excited a strange feeling of interest. No other female in the isle had borne the name since the death of that Evangeline whose statue adorned the market-place.

The child smiled; her smile was like sunlight. Short light-brown curls hung down to her shoulders. Her brown eyes looked innocently into theirs. No hard task to welcome such a visitor; already had the new Evangeline won the hearts of the islanders.

Father Sebastian turned to Ranf, and said,—

"I perceive no likeness between you and this little maid."

"Why should there be? Ah! I see your thought. But it will not stand the test of reason."

“ Is the child an orphan, then, seeing that she is here unattended by blood kith or kin ? ”

“ Accept her as such,” replied Ranf. “ The more likely are you to be bound to her by ties of affection, if they happen to grow between you ; the more likely is she to be bound to you in the same way. Say to Mauvain,” he continued, addressing Harold, “ that we are content to stay upon this isle, and that we are as glad to be quit of you as you are to be quit of me.”

“ Your message shall be delivered,” said Harold gaily, “ word for word. Princess of the Silver Isle, I kiss your fairy fingers.”

He waved his hand to Father Sebastian in token of adieu, and turned towards the shore, where his boat was waiting for him. Before midnight the schooner, gliding through the luminous track of moonlight on the sea, disappeared from the sight of the islanders.

CHAPTER IV.

RANF, THE DEFORMED.

FAIR and lithe and graceful was Evangeline; as beautiful as the Evangeline of old, between whom and the child committed to their care the islanders grew to believe there was in some strange way a spiritual connection. Their first duty was to decide in whose charge Evangeline should be placed. They feared that Ranf would claim her, and it was a relief to them when he said he intended to live alone and to shift for himself. It appeared to the islanders to accord with the fitness of things that Evangeline's childhood should be passed in the house owned by Mauvain. It was occupied by a family named Sylvester, and Evangeline, adopted by universal consent as the child of the Silver Isle, was received by the Sylvesters as a member of their family.

Her friendship for such a being as Ranf, was to the islanders the strangest of enigmas. He whom all men avoided and who avoided all men, to whom no woman held out the hand of friendship, and who neither courted nor desired friendly communion, was the last person in the world the islanders would have chosen as the friend of Evangeline. But she had pretty wilful ways against which their strongest persuasions were powerless. In vain they sought to woo her from Ranf, believing, as they conscientiously did, that the association was harmful to her. Despite their entreaties and remonstrances, she was staunch and true to the cripple, whose misshapen features assumed a tender expression in the light of her beautiful smile. The islanders never beheld Ranf in this aspect. When he descended to the valleys, as he was compelled to do occasionally for provisions, they saw a morose, ill-featured man, deformed in body, short, crooked, and surly-mannered, who gave back three frowns for one, and paid cold words and looks with bitter interest. If anything could have added to the horror entertained by the islanders towards the

mountain of snow, it was its adoption by Ranf as his home. He built upon it three huts at various points: the first a few hundred feet above the altitude of the valleys, the second in the mid-distance, the third very near to the topmost peak. The life he led there, having for his companions only goats and birds and dogs, was in fit accordance with his morose moods. Nature had inclosed his evil mind in a deformed case, so that he should be less able to impose upon his fellows. His constant presence among them would have been a calamity; it was well, therefore, that he should have chosen the fatal mountain for his dwelling-place. Next to the misfortune of being compelled to submit to his residence on the isle (for although their word was given, they chafed at the infliction), it was what they would most have desired. This was the judgment of the islanders upon Ranf the deformed.

The judgment was a growth, and was formed from direct evidence. It would undoubtedly have been a difficult matter for the inhabitants of the Silver Isle to have entertained immediately cordial relations towards one whose outward shape

was as ungainly as his manners were uncouth, and whose physical malformation was not counterbalanced by mental grace or sweetness. But the islanders were just men, and in the course of time, had Ranf cared to conciliate them and win their favour and good words, their sense of justice would have been stronger than their instinctive aversion. They might have been moved to exercise the rare virtue of ascertaining what was good in a man who possessed no outward recommendation, and giving him credit for it, instead of the common human failing of magnifying what was repulsive and condemning him for it. To this better end, it was necessary that they should have an insight into Ranf's inner nature. He supplied them with material. He had a full appreciation of the manner in which he had been received upon his first appearance in the Silver Isle, and he took a malicious pleasure in exhibiting his worst qualities in their worst light. He allowed his hair to grow wild, he exaggerated his natural deformities, he delighted in uncouth gestures, he sneered at the simple customs of the islanders, and in a general way he

played into the hands of their prejudices. The mutual resentment thus engendered grew stronger as the weeks and the months passed by.

The first serious impression against Ranf was produced on his first Sabbath in the Silver Isle. It was a day sacredly observed by the islanders—a day of rest and religious contemplation, upon which only the simplest and most innocent pleasures were permitted. The hour for prayers had arrived; the church in the valley was full, but Ranf was not among the worshippers. The islanders spoke of the circumstance gravely, and addressed the minister upon the subject. He sought Ranf, and gently admonished him. Ranf opened his eyes wide.

“How old are you, minister?” he inquired.

“I have lived forty years,” was the reply.

“And I a year longer,” said Ranf, “therefore my judgment is likely to be as ripe as yours. As ripe! Forty times riper, I should say, for every year of my life has in its experiences been equal to those of forty years in the lives of ordinary

men. Look upon me, minister. You see a man cut out of the natural mould. Something is passing through your mind with reference to me. What is it?"

"Pity."

"But I don't ask you for it. What! Shall I beg for it, of you and other men, by whining of my deformity, and then be grateful to those who give, and humble to those who mock me for a misfortune I could not avert? Pity? Give it to your dogs! What want you of me?"

"You have come to live among us."

"Well?"

"We wish you to be as other men—"

Ranf interrupted him quickly. "But I am not as other men. Can you straighten my body?"

"It is out of my power."

"Not being able to do that, are you mad enough to think you can straighten that part of me which you cannot see? Are the men in this isle gifted with spiritual insight, and with miraculous power of healing mental wounds? Then they are more than mortal."

"You have suffered in the past," said the priest in a tone of compassion.

Ranf smiled scornfully. “Truly I have memories. A sleeping child, lying before me like a new-born flower. A sleeping woman, never again to open mortal eye upon the world. Memories? Aye, they live within me, never to be forgotten. Here is a bare waste—and here some streams of blood which time has not dried up—and here a patch of flowers, not yet quite withered!”

“Look forward, upward!” cried the priest, pointing earnestly to the fair sky above.

Ranf’s malicious eyes followed the direction of the priest’s hand.

“I have farther to look than you,” he said, “being some inches lower. What do you see there?”

“God is there.”

“I ask you what you see, and you answer with a platitude—a foundation of shadow upon which priests erect reliefs of various shapes and colours, each one of which gives the lie to the others. God is here!” and Ranf, stooping to the ground, plucked a blade of grass, and held it in his open palm. “Here is surer evidence of Nature’s wondrous work. I prefer to

look downwards. Earth is sweeter than vapour. I have come to live upon this isle. True. How have I been received? With pleasant looks and words of welcome? Your men avoid me, your women fly from me, your children are being taught by example to look upon me with aversion. I have heard that on this isle you boast of exercising an even-handed justice. It is a boast, neither more nor less. For what kind of justice is that which declares, knowing nothing of me except what is seen and what I would rid myself of if I could, that I am unfit to associate with the clean-limbed men of the Silver Isle? Ah, you are rare justice-mongers! Take scorn for scorn. I give it—full measure!"

"Can I do nothing to soften you?" asked the priest, distressed by Ranf's bitter words.

"Minister," said Ranf with mock humility, "my mind, alas! is as twisted as my body. It is entangled with doubts. I have no reverence; I have no faith; I have no creed by which I can juggle myself into the belief that I am a saint."

"It would be an arrogant belief, in you

or any. You need enlightenment. We ask you to worship with us; we will pray for you."

"And if your prayers succeed, there will be hope that I may mount to heaven upon the back of a better-shaped man than myself! Truly, this is an isle of self-sacrifice! Do you lose sight of your own salvation? Which, let me tell you, needs all the prayers that you can pray. And for my sake! For the sake of such a man as I!" He twirled grotesquely before the priest, and contorted his features. "Let the job alone, minister. You never saw an angel of my shape, in dream or picture. You make your angels sleek and trim, in a mould as beautiful as it is false."

"You speak," said the priest sadly, "as one without religion."

Ranf waved his hands around and above him with comprehensive gesture. "Here is my religion," he rejoined, "and here my church. I need no human teachers. I set no creed for you; set none for me."

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERERS.

THE Sylvesters were five in family, and represented three generations : Matthew Sylvester, a man in his sixth decade, his son Paul, Paul's wife Margaret, and their two children, Joseph and Gabrielle. Upon Evangeline's introduction into the household, Joseph was seven and Gabrielle four years of age.

That Evangeline should find a home in the house which by right belonged to Mauvain was natural and just. But the idea did not emanate from the islanders ; the first suggestion of such an arrangement came from Margaret Sylvester. The moment the woman saw Evangeline she implored to be allowed to adopt the child as her own, and as she was a good wife and a good mother, and was supported in her wish by Paul and Matthew

Sylvester, there could be no reasonable opposition to the offer. Ranf, also, had a voice in the matter. He made it known that, although he intended to shift for himself and to live apart from the islanders, he expected to be satisfied with the home selected for Evangeline. "I shall not trouble the woman who takes charge of her," he said, "but I must see that she is one who is not likely from caprice to deny me the right of seeing the child when I desire." He visited the Sylvester family once only, using his eyes more than his tongue, and after exchanging a few words with Margaret, expressed himself satisfied.

The history of the elder members of the Sylvester family was strange and romantic, and differed from that of most of the residents of the Silver Isle. Matthew Sylvester, born upon the isle, and marrying when he was twenty-five years of age, lived in apparent contentment until he lost his wife. When this misfortune fell upon him he became restless, and his eyes wandered seawards with an eager longing in them; and opportunity offering, he announced his intention of leaving the isle. There was no restraint upon the movements of the

inhabitants ; every man was free to go and come as he pleased; but in the event of one leaving and returning after a lapse of years he seldom regained his place among his fellows. It was expected that he should give an account of the manner of his life during his absence, and it generally happened that the story of adventure contained episodes which, being slurred over, produced in the minds of his hearers a suspicion that something was being concealed from their knowledge which was not to the wanderer's credit. Under any circumstances the experiences he was supposed to have acquired in the outer world did not tell in his favour. It was as though he had passed through the fire, and had not been purified. In their relations to the land, as a people, the islanders were thoroughly conservative. It was not exactly regarded as disloyal for a man to leave the country of his birth, but it most surely weakened the tie by which he was bound to his comrades.

Matthew Sylvester was left a widower with one child, Paul ; and the islanders, by whom he was loved for his open, generous ways, and for a certain gay freedom of manner which distinguished him from the

throng of men, endeavoured to dissuade him from his intention of leaving the isle ; but when they saw that he was determined to go, they discontinued their endeavours to turn him from his purpose.

“ You may make your mind easy about your son,” they said ; “ he shall be properly brought up, and shall be taught to bear you in loving remembrance. The thought of him may bring you back to us.”

“ I intend to take my son with me,” Matthew replied.

They expostulated with him. “ A child needs a woman’s care, and our women are ready to receive your boy.”

Again they found Matthew stubborn ; he refused to part with Paul, saying,—

“ I must have something to love. A man cannot live a healthy life upon dreams.”

The islanders were not word-wasters ; what they said they meant. Yea was yea, and nay was nay. They bade Matthew God-speed, and he wandered with his son into the unknown world.

He was absent for twenty years, during which time the islanders heard nothing of

him. Suddenly, without announcement or forewarning, he returned, and with him his son Paul, now grown to strong manhood. They were accompanied by a young and attractive woman, Paul's wife, Margaret, in appearance like a gipsy. It was not only she, with her dark skin and flashing eyes, who bore the gipsy stamp ; the two men were embrowned by the sun, and had a free air of travel upon them. The evidences of an adventurous life were clearly apparent ; their clothes were stained and worn, and there was more colour in them than the islanders were accustomed to ; they wore their hats jauntily, and their voices were loud and merry. The islanders scarcely knew the Sylvesters at first, so long a time had elapsed since their departure from the isle. But Matthew soon brought himself to the remembrance of old friends, and shook hands heartily with them, as did Paul, without any restraint of manner, although every face he saw was strange to him. Their gay bearing produced a curious effect upon the islanders. It jarred a little, and yet was not displeasing.

“ We have thought of you often,” said

Matthew's friends, "and wondered especially what had become of your little son."

"No longer little," responded Matthew, "a man in heart and inches. This is his wife, Margaret."

The islanders saluted the woman with grave courtesy; their decision respecting her had yet to be made. Their own people had a claim upon them, and a common right to live among them; they belonged to the soil. But something must be known of the stranger before they could hold out the hand of friendship to her.

Their grave manner did not discompose Margaret. She returned their salutation with rough grace, and absently, her mind being occupied. She was thinking whether a life in this fair and lovely isle would be suitable to her. It was not for the inhabitants to welcome her; it was for her to welcome them.

One enduring impression the isle always produced upon those who breathed its air—an impression of perfect restfulness and peace. Often, during the fever of his busy life in the great world, had it stolen upon Matthew with soothing effect. Through the glare and turmoil had come the soft

lapping of the waves and the movement of idle clouds, as he had heard and seen them in his younger days, and the memory never failed to bring relief to his jaded mind.

“Is it your intention to stay for good with us?” asked Matthew’s friends.

“If we stay,” replied Matthew, “I hope it will be for good. The world has not been kind to us; we wooed it, and flattered it in a cunning way, but the points of our quills were not sharp enough; and I fancy our skins were too tender. We have taken our part, and have received hard knocks. You see, friends, in the world one cannot live upon nothing. A little would do, for the life is adventurous, and there’s movement in it. What puts spice into the days is their uncertainty, but it is possible to have too much of this spice. We had occasionally, and it kept us awake. This was necessary, for where we have been, it is next door to death to sleep too long; in an hour you are forgotten, and another takes your place. We knew it, and were always on the move, trying to climb the ladder, mounting one step and slipping down two. It generally happens, and no

one to give you a hand. For all that, we were not fools. Wait, we will show you something; Margaret has a rare gift. Sing."

Thereupon Margaret lifted up her voice, and sang a melody that sounded like the music of birds. The song was in keeping with the scene—the blue and white clouds, the shining water, the fragrant air, all were in harmony with Margaret's voice. It was strange to hear this strong, large-limbed, swarthy-faced woman sing notes as soft and sweet as ever issued from a linnet's throat. The islanders were charmed; and all discordant impressions produced by the unaccustomed licence of Matthew's speech instantly vanished.

"Will you believe," continued Matthew, when the song was ended, "that such a voice was not magical enough to fill our pockets? What is wanted outside the girdle of these silver waves is arrogance, and strut, and clang, the natural capital of brazen braggarts, who bellow sweeter talents into obscurity. Let me tell you. Paul here was a man, two-and-twenty. He and I had been not only father and son to each other, we had been friends, lovers

almost, heart-and-soul companions—comrades in the truest sense. We were never parted ; we shared and shared alike. We had slept in garrets, in cellars, in hovels, in palaces—aye, friends, it is true—in forests and barns, and Heaven knows where and how. We had feasted and starved, had been courted and laughed at, bowed to and buffeted. Oh, there was colour enough ; we never lacked variety. Sometimes fortune smiled upon us, and we saw golden clouds and fairy ships riding on them ; sometimes fortune frowned upon us, and the rain poured down. Ugh ! how it soaked through our clothes to our skins ! But it always passed away, this discomfort, and we were again as happy as harmless busy days can make a man. For look you, friends, we did no man or woman harm. By good or bad luck we had not learnt to cheat or lie. We simply trudged along the road of life together, boy and man, and laughed when we could—and made others laugh sometimes—and did not always cry when the stones cut our feet. So I grew older, and Paul grew younger ; for that is the way of life until we reach the turning-point, which I had passed

when Paul became a man. He was two-and-twenty, young enough for love. We happened to have money in our pockets, enough for the day, and, making for a certain town, our road lay through a forest."

At this point he suddenly stopped, and said,—

"What follows is not for every ear. To three of my oldest friends whom I see among you"—he indicated them by name—"I will relate the conclusion of my story. If they express themselves satisfied, it will, unless the ways of the isle are altered, be sufficient to convince you that the daughter I have brought with me is worthy of your love and confidence. You see, Margaret," he said, turning to the woman, "we must comply with the unwritten laws of the isle. You have won favour by your singing, but that is a trick; it will be best to win a welcome upon more solid grounds than a woman's tuneful voice."

"They have to approve of me first?" questioned the woman thoughtfully.

"It is not the most gracious way of putting it."

"But it is the straight way," quickly interrupted Margaret.

"Yes, it is the straight way. You are right, Margaret."

"Do not forget," said Margaret then, "that I have also to approve of them," with a nod in the direction of the islanders who were grouped around. "If I do not like them, I shall not care to stay."

The islanders expressed approval of her words, and one said, "That is honestly spoken."

"Nor," added the woman, "shall I care to stay unless I feel they are glad to have me."

"They will be glad," said Matthew. "Our first concern is to know who will give us shelter till the matter is decided."

A dozen voices answered him at once, all eagerly expressing hearty friendship and good-will; and Matthew, laughing, was about to accept the offer most agreeable to him, when Margaret held up her hand and checked him. "Have you not," she asked, "an empty house or shed—either will do—which we can occupy till all of us have made up our minds about each other?"

They fell in with her mood, admiring her independent spirit. Mauvain's house was unoccupied, and being furnished, was ready to receive a tenant. The islanders offered it to Matthew Sylvester, who accepted it. He had not returned to the Silver Isle empty-handed. Boxes filled with all kinds of paraphernalia, cages containing strange birds, with many curious oddments, lay about the beach. These were removed into Mauvain's house, and in the evening, while Margaret was busy setting the place in order—for even if they did not take up their residence on the isle, they would have to wait for a ship to bear them away—Matthew Sylvester, closeted with the friends he had named, concluded the story of his adventures.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF MARGARET SYLVESTER.

“WHAT I have to tell you,” said Matthew to his friends, “relates chiefly to Margaret, and I would not have her know you are acquainted with her story. Therefore I confide it to your keeping, and yours only, of all the men and women on the isle. Although twenty years of a wandering life may alter a man’s ways and mode of speech, it will scarcely change his inner being. Once a fool, always a fool; once a rogue, always a rogue; and if I was ever worthy of your confidence, I am worthy of it now. It stands to reason. In matters of right and wrong we travel along the currents of life in harmony with our instincts, and our course is generally as we shape it. There is luck, certainly, and my boat may glide into a golden harbour, while yours may be dashed to pieces in the rapids. Those are

the exceptions ; the rule is, according to one's inheritance and one's own endeavour.

“ So much for my preamble.

“ I left off as we were making our way, Paul and I, to a certain town, the road to which lay through a forest. Paul, not so strong as I, having had a spell of fever upon him, grew wearied when within half a mile of our destination. Observing his fatigue, and that his lips were parched, I bade him rest while I sought a spring of fresh water.

“ I wandered into the recesses of the forest before I found what I was in search of, and then I filled my flask at a clear cold spring, and hastened back by a nearer path. I had occasion to pass a spot where the trees were thickly clustered, and before I had left them behind me I heard the voice of a girl, sobbing. I could not run from a sound that expressed both physical and mental pain, so I walked in the direction of the sobs, and, entering the thicket of trees, saw a young woman sitting on the ground by the side of a sleeping man. The man was older than the girl by forty years. He looked a vagabond from head to foot, while the girl, scarcely eighteen years of age, as I

judged, appeared to be cut out for something better. The only point of resemblance between them was in their clothes, which had seen much better days. For the matter of that, we were but little better off.

"The girl was Margaret. She seemed to be frightened at my appearance, and she placed her finger to her lips, entreating me in that action not to awaken her companion.

"'Have you water there?' she asked in a whisper, pointing to my flask.

"I handed her the flask, and she drank. It struck me that she might be in want of food as well as drink, and I took some bread from my wallet, and offered it to her. She accepted it with gratitude, and began to eat it hurriedly.

"Now, friends, you will discover, if you have not done so already, that the beauty of Margaret is not of a kind to win affection off-hand. Looking at her for the first time with a careless eye, she not being in a special manner recommended to your favour, you see a woman with flashing eyes, and brown skin, and features that appear larger than are supposed to

be womanly. Nature has built her on a grand scale, and as a rule such women as she, although they immediately attract the eye, do not so soon engage the affections. But Margaret gains upon you after a little, and a tenderness comes into her face which you had not at first observed. The true soul of the woman is, as it were, hidden behind a veil, and does not instantly reveal itself.

“Something of what I have endeavoured to convey to you I experienced as I stood looking down upon Margaret as she ate and drank. The man was a coarse-grained, ill-featured fellow, but there was power of a dangerous kind in him, apparent even in his sleep.

“‘Can I render you any further service?’ I asked of Margaret, as she gave me back my flask.

“‘No,’ she replied, ‘except to go at once before he wakes. Take my thanks with you.’

“‘What were you sobbing so bitterly for?’ I asked.

“She answered me evasively, saying it was natural she should cry, being hungry.

“I shook my head; I saw that her

grief lay deeper than hunger. The man moved uneasily in his sleep, and fearing that I might get Margaret into trouble, I left her hastily.

“ Paul and I reached the town for which we were bound, and put up at an inn, not more than a mile from the forest. We retired early to rest, intending to be early afoot on the following morning. Paul was soon asleep, but I was kept awake by thought of Margaret. The face of the sorrowing girl haunted me; I seemed to hear her sobs, and in the darkened room I saw the dim outlines of her figure as she sat by the sleeping man in the forest. I did what might be considered a mad thing; but I am generally swayed by impulse. I rose from my bed, dressed myself quietly, so as not to disturb Paul, and crept softly out of the room. With no clear purpose in my mind, except to see if Margaret had left the forest, I made my way to the thicket of trees which had concealed her from observation. I found her still there. This time she was alone, lying on the ground asleep, her head resting on the outspreading roots of a tree. As I gazed upon her she awoke,

and, alarmed at the presence of a stranger, struggled to her feet. I soon relieved her mind, telling her I came as a friend, and that it appeared to me she required one. Why, I asked, was she sleeping in the forest without protection ?

“ ‘ I am safe here,’ she said ; ‘ no one will harm me.’

“ ‘ Where is the man I saw with you this afternoon ? ’

“ ‘ Gone into the town, to endeavour to obtain food or money.’

“ ‘ You are poor, then ? ’

“ She nodded.

“ ‘ And hungry still ? ’

“ She nodded again.

“ I could not give her food, as I had brought none with me, but I told her if she would accompany me to the inn, I would pay for food and shelter for her. She thanked me, but said she could not go, and I perceived that a secret motive held her back. The reason why I was so free in my offers, without consideration for the man, was that I felt certain there was no bond of relationship between him and her. The tone in which she spoke of him was a sufficient indication ; it ex-

pressed repugnance, hate almost, and something of fear. Questioning Margaret, I found that my idea was correct ; they were not in any way related to each other. I asked her why she remained with him, then. She replied that she had a motive, a powerful, passionate, absorbing motive, which prevented her from leaving him until a person she was in search of was restored to her. She was not married ; she had never loved. Who, then, was the person to whom she vaguely alluded, in a voice broken by sobs, and in a manner which betokened how deeply her heart was engaged in the quest ? I took some pains to convince Margaret that my desire to assist and befriend her was an unselfish one, and was prompted solely by pity for her forlorn condition.

“ ‘ My son and I,’ said I, ‘ are sometimes as poor as you, but we might be able to aid you. I see that you lead a wandering life. So do we. We are actors in a small way, and are travelling continually about.’ ”

“ She interrupted me eagerly. It seemed, she said, as if Heaven had sent me to her. She asked me if in our wanderings, or in any travelling company we

had been associated with, I had seen a girl of her own age, resembling her in features, but fairer than she, and smaller in stature? She described the girl to me, most minutely—the shape of her hands, the colour of her eyes and hair, the beauty of her teeth, lips, ears, dimples, finger-nails, eye-lashes—not a point by which the girl could be in some way identified was omitted ; and as Margaret proceeded with her description of this creature, whom it was plain she loved with all the strength of her nature, she trembled, and sobbed, and suffered as only those suffer who have lost one dearer than life itself.

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET AND CLARICE.

“THE girl she described must have been wondrously beautiful, and once seen, could scarcely have been forgotten. I had not met with her, and I told Margaret so, and having heard so much, I easily prevailed upon her to relate to me all the particulars of her trouble. The girl of whom she was in search was her twin-sister, but resembling her only in the shape and form of her features. Their father led such a life as I and Paul were leading; he was an educated man, but poor and fond of wandering. He travelled—his wife being dead—for years through many countries, accompanied by his children.

“‘He loved us devotedly,’ said Margaret, ‘and we were most happy with him. He taught us to play comedies, and, indeed, wrote pieces to suit us, and we acted them

to simple people in villages and small towns. We did not perform in large cities. My father appeared to avoid them purposely, and when it was necessary for us to pass through them in our travels, he made a point of shunning observation. Ah, how happy was our life ! We never knew the pinch of poverty, and scarcely knew what care was. Clarice, my darling sister Clarice, was the flower of our little garden. Perhaps it was because she was so much smaller than I, and looked so much younger, although there were only a few minutes' difference in our ages, that I looked upon her as a child and upon myself as a woman. Indeed, I was the mother of the family, and Clarice, I believed and believe, loved me as truly and faithfully as I loved her. I was not jealous of her, although she was always the favourite; she deserved to be, for she was beautiful and gentle ; while I—well, I have a temper, a little too quick at times, but not bad, indeed not bad ! And I am better now since I have lost Clarice. I have to suffer without repining, or I may never find her !'

" My heart was moved to deep tenderness by Margaret's plaintive words, which

expressed a world of inherent goodness and unselfish love. Shortly before her father's death they were joined by the man who was now Margaret's companion and master. Her father's health was breaking, and this man, by smooth and cunning ways, and by pretended tenderness towards the girls, obtained so complete a dominion over him that, shortly before his death, which happened three years before I met Margaret, he gave, by written legal document, the control of his children into the hands of the villain.

"A villain indeed he proved. The orphan girls were among strangers; there was not one friend in all the wide world to whom they could turn; they had no relatives, and were in the power of a man whom they could neither love nor respect, and who brought desolation into their young lives. He drove them hither and thither, and made them work and dance for his profit, at all hours and in all seasons, and ruled them with a rod of iron.

"I will give you the rest of Margaret's story in Margaret's own words. I wrote it as she in after-times narrated it to me. Fancying that you hear Margaret speak,

you will be better able to form a proper idea of the nature of the woman I was glad to see my son marry, and whom I now declare to be worthy of your friendship and regard."

* * * * *

"As for me [said Margaret] I could stand such a life ; I am strong and hardy, but it was different with Clarice. She was delicate and fragile, and the work distressed and fatigued her. While our father lived, she had been our pet lamb, and had never received harsh word or look. She had now to endure such hardship as we never supposed would have fallen to her lot ; for we had mapped out a fair future for her, and had indulged in bright dreams of a happy wedded life, with a husband who loved her as we loved her, and children as fair and sweet as our own dear girl. We lived in the sunlight then ; now every hour was dark.

"Clarice did not complain to me, but who should know her strength, and of what she was capable, better than I ? And I knew that the life she was now compelled to live would kill her in a few years. I did what I could to lighten her work,

when our master was not watching us, and I planned a scheme of escape, whither I knew not, for we were driven from place to place, from fair to fair, from show to show, without our being aware in what part of the country, and sometimes in what country, we were making crowds of rough people laugh and applaud.

“The night selected for our flight arrived, and Clarice and I stole away at an hour past midnight, when our master and all in the village were asleep. We had no money, no experience, no knowledge of the world. The only idea in my mind was to escape by a road we had not hitherto traversed, and to trust to fortune for the rest. That the scheme was wild and certain of failure did not occur to me; the one thing to be accomplished was to fly from the tyrant who had brought wretchedness and misery into our lives.

“The night was chosen for its darkness, so that there should be less chance of our being seen, and my plan was defeated in its outset by this precaution. For in my agitation and confusion, and having no light to guide me, I missed my way, and

we had walked a mile in the wrong direction before I discovered my error. We retraced our steps cautiously, for Clarice was frightened, and cried out every moment that we were being followed, and she wept and trembled so, that I reproached myself bitterly for having made so mad an attempt. At length Clarice declared she could walk no farther, and I saw that it would be cruelty to urge her. We sat down mournfully by the roadside, where, cradled in my arms, Clarice fell asleep. We were not half a mile from the village we had left, and it was inevitable that we should be discovered. Some villagers who had seen us perform, going early to their work, caught sight of us and questioned us, and with the cruel joy that all men seem to feel when helpless creatures are being hunted down, they carried the news to our master that his two dancing-girls were running away. He hastened to us in a furious passion, and dragged us before a magistrate, threatening us on the way with most dreadful penalties.

“For my own part, I think I should have had the courage to defy him, but

Clarice took all the strength out of me ; the wild beating of her heart as I pressed her to my side was torture to me.

“ To the magistrate our master related a smooth and plausible story, of the obligations our father was under to him, of the friendship that existed between them, of being appointed guardian to us until we were twenty-one years of age, with detailed accounts of our acts of ingratitude —all of which inventions made me quiver with indignation. His story was conclusive, my denial of its truth was received with contempt, and the magistrate treated us to a homily upon our monstrous conduct, telling us that we could be put into prison for our disobedience and rebellion ; nay, he assisted the case against us by saying that he doubted not the very clothes in which we ran away were the property of our master, and that we could be severely punished for the theft. Our master replied it was true. He could charge us with theft, but he would not do so out of consideration for our youth, and because he intended to fulfil to the best of his ability the trust reposed in him by his dear and dead friend, our father. He did

not say that it would not suit his purpose that we should be imprisoned. He begged for our discharge, and we were released with warnings and admonitions from the magistrate, in whom we should rather have found a friend than an enemy.

“There was no help for us ; we had been given into slavery, and by a dear father who would have shed his heart’s blood for us. But it cannot last for ever, I thought. When Clarice and I are women, we shall be free ; the villain will no longer have power over us. Till then we must submit. So I schooled myself to patience. We were worked harder than ever, and we must have earned a great deal of money, for our performances found favour wherever we went. He was cunning, this master of ours. If we performed to his satisfaction the hard tasks he set for us, he gave us better food and fine promises. If we did not please him, or if money did not flow in plentifully, he placed the coarsest fare before us, with blows for a sauce.

“‘ Cannot you see,’ he said to me one day, ‘ what fools you are to thwart me ? Do as I bid you, and your lives will be

easy and comfortable. All I want is to make money out of you.'

"The villain had no regard for us as human creatures; he and humanity were strangers, and he used us as though we were his chattels, devoid of heart or feeling.

"He had one consuming passion—he was a gambler, and all our earnings were squandered at the gaming-tables. That is why we were always poor, and why he never let us rest. Despite the hard life we led, Clarice grew daily more beautiful; she seemed to belong more to heaven than to earth, and I used to gaze on her with a kind of worship. No wonder she was admired by the common people we played to in the villages; they had never looked upon a fairer face and form. Our master had the same distaste for large cities as our father had; he avoided them most carefully, and we wandered in out-of-the-way places for eight or nine months until Clarice fell ill, and, much against our master's wish, we were compelled to rest awhile until she recovered.

"During this time it was that I began to sing to Clarice, and our master discovered

I had a musical voice which could be turned to profitable account. It was a discovery to us as well as to him; the parts I played in our little comedies were speaking parts, and no opportunity had been afforded me of using my chief gift. Coming in one night while I was singing, our master bade Clarice dance to my voice. She obeyed him, and as I sang she moved gracefully about, in accordance with the suggestion of the melody, now slowly, now with spirit, and now with a sweet and innocent abandon that captivated him as well as me. The child had nearly recovered from her sickness, and she was grateful for returning health; her disposition was naturally gay, and her slavery had not yet lasted long enough to crush all joyousness out of her. There was something spiritual in her movements; the room was but dimly lighted, and as she glided in and out of the shadows, I was overtaken by fear that she might fade from our sight, and that we should see her no more.

“‘Clarice!’ I cried in alarm.

“She sprang towards me; but before she could reach me, our master seized her in his arms.

“‘ You are beautiful ! ’ he said in a thick voice. ‘ I have been blind. You are beautiful, Clarice ! ’

“ He pressed his lips to hers, and Clarice shrieked to me for protection. A sudden fury animated me ; a knife lay near to my hand ; I snatched it from the table, and flew upon the villain. In a moment Clarice was free, and I was striking at him with the knife ; he seized my wrist, and the knife fell to the ground ; and then with all my force I struck at his face with the hand that was free. He pushed me violently from him, and without a word left the room. Then Clarice fell into my arms, and sobbed as though her heart were breaking.

“ I think it was during those few agitating moments that I became a woman. I was but sixteen years of age, but my girlhood came suddenly to an end, and the map of a woman’s life was spread before me. I understood it, and prepared to battle with the bitter reality. After I put Clarice to bed, I picked up the knife ; there was blood upon it.

“ Our master did not appear again that night. The next morning he said that,

Clarice being better, we must be on the move again. We owed him much, he informed us, for our weeks of idleness. I glanced at his hand ; it was bandaged, and there was a mark on his face. I was both glad and afraid, but I was careful not to exhibit the slightest symptom of fear or regret. No reference was made to the occurrence until the evening, when my master said, striving to impart lightness to his voice,—

“‘ You are strong, Margaret.’

“I replied, ‘Thank God for it ! I shall know how to use my strength. Be careful not to provoke me.’

“That was all that passed between us, and when he next spoke to Clarice, it was in his usual tone, that of a master to his servant.

“ He did not deceive me, nor throw me off my guard, and I think he was not aware how often I detected him looking at Clarice with a certain thoughtfulness in his face which I could not rightly interpret at the time. I did not let Clarice out of my sight, and a little story my father used to read to us of a wolf, a lamb, and a faithful watch-dog sometimes crossed my mind in

relation to ourselves. I was determined the wolf should not hurt my lamb ; he would have to tear me to pieces first.

"I had need of all my wits. Keeping watch as I did upon our master's movements, I regarded every new and unusual thing he did with suspicion. He was most careful in his behaviour towards Clarice, and seldom addressed her, making me generally the medium of communication between them, saying, 'Tell Clarice this, or that.' A day or two after her convalescence, he remarked that her illness had left her somewhat weak, and that she required nourishment ; and he gave us wine with our dinner. We drank only a little, for the wine was strong, and mounted to our heads. Under its influence we both laughed and talked too freely, and our master appeared to be pleased with our gaiety, and encouraged us to drink more, filling our glasses for us with merry words. But I happened to look at him as he poured out the wine, and the expression of devilish exultation in his face chilled and warned me. I pushed the full glasses away.

"'Come, Clarice,' I said, and we walked from the room.

“ We drank no more ; we were saved.

“ For a week wine was placed on the table at every meal, but we never touched it.

“ ‘ You are grateful, you girls,’ our master said, with a surly look ; ‘ you deserve kindness ! Why don’t you drink your wine ? ’

“ ‘ We prefer water,’ I replied ; ‘ save your money, master. You will not persuade us to love wine.’

“ ‘ Have your way,’ he muttered in a brutal tone, and raised his arm as though he would have liked to strike me. But he dared not ; he knew that I would no longer submit tamely to his blows.

“ We suffered in other ways for our rebellious conduct ; but we bore all patiently.

“ One night, at the end of a long day’s journey, we saw in the distance the lights of a larger town than we were in the habit of stopping at. To our inexperienced eyes it looked like a fairy illumination. In some parts the houses were very numerous, and quite close together ; hills and terraces were dotted with tiny stars ; and as we neared the town I saw a sheet

of silver water in which the lights were reflected. It was a beautiful sight. I was filled with curiosity, and wondered to myself what our master's purpose could be. Clarice's eyes sparkled.

“‘Are we going to stop in that place?’ she asked.

“‘Yes,’ said our master, ‘we are going to play there. We shall remain a week; if you please me you shall have new dresses.’

“The news set me thinking, but I had no reason to suspect anything wrong. It was good news, I decided; to play in a large town meant better lodgment and better food for Clarice; and I don't know how it was, but I had a vague idea that in such a place some one who had known our father might see us and take pity on us. It never happened. Something more terrible did.

“The hall we were engaged to sing and dance in was situated in the worst part of the town, and was frequented by men and by women it made me blush to come in contact with. The first night's experiences were a sufficient indication of the kind of theatre our master had sold our services

to, and I was careful that Clarice should not exchange a word with a soul but myself. I was curious to know what particular reason had induced our master to depart from his usual practice of exhibiting our talents only in small places, and I learned that the town was celebrated for its gambling-saloons. Here, then, was a reason which I could understand, and my great hope was that he would meet with the gambler's usual luck, and, having lost all, leave the town in disgust. The common people before whom we had been in the habit of performing pleased me best ; they were uncultivated, it was true, but in the place of their ignorance and rough admiration we had now to submit to the polished gaze and insidious compliments of a set of men whose manners were an offence. That they met with no encouragement from us aroused the anger of our master.

“ ‘ The place is not good enough for you, eh ? ’ he cried to me, on the third night of our appearance at the hall.

“ ‘ Not quite,’ I replied.

“ ‘ It will pay you to be civil to my friends,’ he said threateningly.

“‘Your friends do not suit us,’ I answered, looking him full in the face, ‘and if you force them upon us, we shall refuse to work for you. We may obtain a better kind of justice here than we have hitherto met with. We may meet with tender hearts that will pity us and release us from a hateful bondage.’

“‘Tender hearts!’ he sneered. ‘Gentlemen, eh?’

“‘Yes,’ I said, ‘true gentlemen, not lackeys.’

“A dark look clouded the face of the wolf.

“‘I will tame you yet,’ he said.

“It was our misfortune that we were talked about in the town, and that Clarice’s beauty became the theme of general admiration. Before the week was out, a better class of men—and women too—levelled their opera-glasses at us, and on the last night of our engagement our master bade us pack up at once. I was surprised, for the proprietor of the hall wished us to continue to perform, and offered our master a larger sum of money for the renewal of our services than had been agreed upon between them. Our master told me so

much, and took credit to himself for refusing the offer.

“‘ This place is too common for such delicate creatures,’ he said. ‘ You shall have better lodgment.’

“ We did not leave the town ; he conveyed us to a more fashionable quarter, where, to my further surprise, new dresses were given to us, finer than we had ever worn. Everything seemed to be prepared for us, for the dresses fitted us to perfection. The misgivings I felt as we decked ourselves out in this finery were dispelled by the delight which Clarice’s beautiful appearance afforded me. Her dancing-dress was white, with silver trimmings, and was festooned with small blue flowers. My dress was by no means so handsome, and was designed as a foil to Clarice’s, but I looked fairly well in it, and was happily contented that Clarice should bear the palm of grace and loveliness. When we were dressed, our master came and criticised us, and I could not find fault with him for openly admiring Clarice.

“‘ These pretty clothes become you, Clarice,’ he said. ‘ Would you like to be always dressed as daintily ?’

“ ‘ Oh, yes ! ’ replied Clarice.

“ ‘ Well,’ he said, ‘ stranger things have happened. Do your best to-night, both of you. You are going to dance before real gentlemen—true gentlemen, Margaret, who have seen the world. We have done with lackeys. You cannot now say that I have not tried to please you. Be prepared ; I will come for you when it is time.’

“ I observed as he left the room that he was attired in a better fashion than usual.

“ It was nearly an hour before we were called. Our conversation turned upon our father, of his kind ways, of the happy life we had lived with him ; and I told Clarice how often he and I used to speak of her, and told her also something of the happy future we had hoped would be hers.

“ ‘ It may come yet, Clarice,’ I said fondly. ‘ It may come yet, my dear sister. If I were a prince, I should make you my princess, and challenge the world with you. Ah ! if some kind heart would purchase our liberty from our master, or if Heaven were to set us free, I should fear nothing ! We should be able to live—I see the way ; I am wiser than I was—

and we would wander hand in hand from village to town, from town to village, now playing to simple folk, now to great, until the prince came—your prince, Clarice!—and claimed my treasure.'

"'And you, Marguerite,' said Clarice; she always called me so, 'you must have your prince as well as I.'

"'No,' I replied, 'I shall never leave you, Clarice—never, never! How could I live without you? You are my heart, my soul, my life!'

"She gave me back words as tender as my own, and asked me to sing to her. We sat in the dark, with our arms around each other, and I sang my heart out to her.

"Ah! if the good God had struck us dead as we sat there, how merciful would have been the deed! The harsh voice of our master broke the happy spell.

"'Come,' he said; 'they are waiting for you.'

"We went to him, and he threw large cloaks over our fine dresses, and led us to the theatre in which we were to perform. It was part of the hotel in which we were staying; our rooms were at the top of the

house, and having been brought there in the dark night, I had had no opportunity of observing how grand a building it was. It filled me now with wonder and admiration. As we descended the noble staircases, and traversed the broad passages, many persons stopped to gaze at us, but our master hurried us on, as though anxious to avoid observation. We passed great saloons, and heard from within the sounds of laughter and music, and saw ladies and gentlemen, fashionably dressed, passing in and out. Presently we entered a dark passage, at the end of which was the stage-door of the theatre, and soon we were on the stage.

“It was a small stage, and the curtain was down. A scene was set, representing a rural landscape, with trees and water and cattle, most exquisitely painted. In the background was a bridge which we were to cross, I first, playing the castanets, with which I was very skilful, and Clarice afterwards. Then I was to sing one of my lullaby songs, and Clarice was to dance to it. We had rehearsed the entertainment in our room at the top of the house, under the direction of our

master, but we were so accustomed to each other that we could have performed any of our numerous little sketches at a moment's notice without preparation.

“When, the curtain being drawn, I crossed the bridge and faced the audience, I was so overpowered by the novelty of the scene before me that all power of self-control deserted me. The body of the theatre was scarcely larger than an ordinary drawing-room, and was furnished with the utmost elegance. The paintings on the walls and ceilings, the velvet chairs framed in gold, the numberless wax candles which shed a soft and mellow light around, the delicious soothing sound of falling water from a perfumed fountain on each side of the stage, made it a theatre fit for a king. How different from the barn we had been in the habit of playing in! How coarse and common they became as I stood upon this lovely stage, surrounded by this fairy splendour! I was like one in an enchanted dream, enveloped in a voluptuous mist, which beguiled my senses from all that was real and true in life.

“There were but few persons present, not more than twenty or thirty, and all

gentlemen, but so dazzled was I that I could not distinguish a face. A murmur of applause recalled me to my duty, and then I knew that Clarice was on the stage, and was moving gracefully to the cadence of the song which I was almost unconsciously singing. It was over in a moment, as it seemed, and the curtain was down, and Clarice was lying in my arms, palpitating with pleasure and excitement. A soft dreamy look was in her eyes, a transparent colour in her cheeks, a tender smile upon her lips. More delicate and spiritual in her nature than I, she was less able to resist the impressions which had beguiled my senses as well as hers.

“‘ Is it real, Marguerite? is it real?’ she whispered.

“The answer was given by the audience, who were calling loudly for Clarice. Not a voice asked for Margaret.

“‘ Clarice! Clarice! Clarice!’ was all we heard.

“The curtain was drawn aside and I led Clarice forward. Then came calls for a repetition of the sketch, and, without leaving the stage, I commenced my song and Clarice her dance, amid rapt and

earnest attention. ‘Beautiful, bewitching !’ cried the gentlemen as the curtain fell, and again we were called ; and then it rained roses, which Clarice gathered, and I for her, with smiles and tears. Our master, who stood in the side-scenes, said,—

“‘ You have done well. On with your cloaks ; closer, closer over your heads, girls ! If they want to see your faces again, they must pay for it.’

“ When we were in our room he said,—

“‘ Margaret, if fortune favours me to-night, we will make the world sing the praises of our pretty Clarice.’

“ I did not ask him the meaning of his words. Between him and ourselves there was nothing in common, and I took no interest in his doings, so long as they did not affect us. Clarice and I were excited and overwrought, and as we prepared to retire to rest we spoke but few words to each other.

“‘ Let us dream of it, Marguerite,’ said Clarice ; ‘ I want it to happen all over again.’

“ I enfolded her in my arms. ‘ God bless you, Clarice !’ I said.

“ ‘ God bless you, dear sister ! ’ murmured she ; and so we fell asleep.

“ My heart bleeds as I recall what followed during that never-to-be-forgotten terrible night.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET CONTINUES HER STORY.

“ As well as I could judge, we must have slept for two or three hours when I was suddenly awakened by a knocking outside our room. I sat up in bed, and, listening, heard a tapping at the door. For a little while I did not speak, but the tapping grew louder, and the person outside shook the door to rouse me. Then I asked who was there, and was answered in a woman’s voice, which I recognized as that of an elderly servant who had attended to us and brought us our meals the day before.

“ ‘ What do you want?’ I asked.

“ ‘ Let me in,’ cried the woman; ‘ let me in immediately.’

“ Clarice was asleep. I rose, and throwing the large cloak over me, went to the door. But as I was about to turn the

key a suspicion of I knew not what entered my mind. I had not time to follow out the current of my suspicion ; the door was shaken with greater violence.

“ ‘ For Heaven’s sake ! ’ I cried, ‘ cease that noise. What is it you want ? ’

“ ‘ I must speak to you at once.’

“ ‘ Are you alone ? ’

“ ‘ Yes. Who should be with me, do you think ? ’

“ I reflected a moment. There was no reason to suppose that the woman was an enemy. What had I to fear from her ? I opened the door, and she entered. I had hitherto taken no particular notice of her, but now I observed her more closely, being enabled to do so by the aid of the light which she held in her hand, and I felt that she was a woman it would not be safe to trust.

“ ‘ This is a strange time of the night to call me,’ I said ; ‘ what is the meaning of it ? ’

“ ‘ You are inclined to be saucy, mistress,’ she said insolently.

“ I interrupted her. ‘ You said you must speak to me at once. What have you to say to me ? ’

“‘‘What I was bidden to say,’ she replied maliciously, playing with my anxiety.

“‘‘Bidden by whom?’

“‘‘By your master.’ She paused in the expectation of my speaking, but I said nothing, and waited for her to proceed. ‘Yes, by your master—and the other gentlemen.’

“‘‘Who are the other gentlemen?’

“‘‘The gentlemen who are with him, and who paid for your performance to-night. You are to come down at once with me, you and your sister.’

“‘‘What are you about to do?’ I said, standing before her to prevent her from going to the bed. ‘I will not have my sister disturbed.’

“‘‘You are a grand miss! You’ll not have this, and you’ll not have that! Be sensible—there’s no time to lose. Dress yourselves, the pair of you. It will be worse for you if you make a bother about it.’

“‘‘Why should we get up in the middle of the night? What are we called upon to do?’

“‘‘My dear,’ said the woman, and her

tone of confident familiarity made me shudder. ‘Gentlemen get curious notions into their heads sometimes, and it is not always safe to cross them. They want you to dance and sing for them.’

“‘At this hour !’ I exclaimed in indignation. ‘Indeed, we shall do no such thing.’

“‘You speak with an air, mistress. Your master said you would most likely refuse.’

“‘He was right, for once. I do refuse.’

“‘And he bade me tell you,’ continued the woman, ‘that if you did not obey his orders, he should come and fetch you himself.’

“‘If he dare !’

“‘I think he will dare, mistress. He is not a man I should care to anger, and in his present temper I’ll not answer for what may happen if you are foolish and obstinate.’

“‘I do not need your advice. I shall not go. There is no law that can compel us to work for him in the middle of the night.’

“The woman laughed. ‘There is rich man’s law and poor man’s law. Call your sister, and do as you are bid.’

“‘I shall not allow my sister to be awakened,’ I said resolutely. ‘You have my answer.’

“‘Think twice, mistress.’

“‘You have my answer. Go, or I will put you out.’

“‘You are a determined creature,’ said the woman, ‘young as you are. If I were as fair as you and that chick there, I should be glad of the opportunity of pleasing two fine gentlemen. One of them is worth winning. Tut, tut, mistress! don’t look black at me, and don’t try to make yourself out better than you are. Girls like you are not over particular—’

“‘Leave the room!’ I cried passionately. Her insults almost maddened me, and there must have been that in my face which frightened her, for she disappeared swiftly, without speaking another word.

“The moment she was gone I closed the door upon her, with the intention of locking it, and not opening it again till daylight. But the key was gone! I searched for it on the floor; it was not there. Could the woman have taken it, in

accordance with instructions given to her by our master, or had she done so out of malice ?

“ I listened. All was silent, and I was in the dark. At such a time darkness was my enemy, light my friend. I was certain that my master would come immediately he received my message, and as certain that the woman would convey it to him in a manner as little favourable to myself as possible. I groped my way to the table, upon which I had left a candle and matches before we went to bed. The candle was there, but no matches ; they also had been taken, and I had no means of obtaining a light. I was in despair.

“ At first I thought of going boldly into the passage and calling for assistance, but I relinquished the design. My experiences had not been of such a nature as to encourage me to place faith in strangers. We were in a strange hotel, knowing no person, known to none. In the event of one chivalrously inclined appearing, how should I word my appeal to him ? We were undoubtedly servants, and violence had not been offered to us. I had absolutely nothing to say that would insure sympathy.

Then there was the danger of leaving Clarice. No, I had no option but to wait for events. One safeguard was still left to me ; I could barricade the door.

“There was, however, only the small table in the room available for the purpose. The washstand was a fixture, and to move the bed was beyond my strength. That design had also to be abandoned.

“The conversation between me and the woman had been carried in a low tone, and had not aroused Clarice. Feeling how necessary it was that I should be prepared for action, I determined to keep awake, and I began hurriedly to dress myself. I was much distressed at the discovery that the only clothes to my hand were the fine garments in which we had given our performance. Before I was fully attired, the woman returned. She opened the door without ceremony, and her boldness convinced me that she had taken the key.

“‘Your master has sent me back,’ she said triumphantly. ‘I told you how it would be. He will be here presently. Ah ! I see you have grown sensible ; you are dressing yourself.’

“‘ Why did you steal the key from the door ? ’ I asked.

“‘ Fair words, if you please, mistress,’ she retorted. ‘ It might have been to your advantage to be civil to me.’

“ I made an effort to soften her.

“‘ Will you not help us ? ’ I implored. ‘ Cannot you see that we are friendless and unprotected ? We will show our gratitude.’

“‘ How much have you got ? ’ she said, bending forward eagerly, and I heard the chinking of money in her hand.

“‘ We have no money,’ I replied sadly, ‘ not the smallest coin ; ’ and I could not help adding bitterly, ‘ I would buy you if I could.’

“‘ I am to be bought,’ she said. ‘ When you are my age, you will be of my mind. There is only one true friend—money.’

“ The voice of my master outside struck terror into me.

“‘ Margaret ! ’ he called huskily.

“‘ Well ? ’ I answered.

“‘ Are you getting ready ? ’

“‘ No,’ I found courage to reply, although my heart was fainting within me.

“ ‘ Do so at once,’ he said, and I judged from his tone that he was making a violent effort to suppress his passion, ‘ unless you wish me to come and drag you out. I will do it’—and here he swore a dreadful oath—‘ if you utter another obstinate word.’

“ I was compelled to confess to myself that obedience would be perhaps the wisest course.

“ ‘ Tell me what is required of us ? ’

“ ‘ Two gentlemen, friends of mine—but that is no recommendation—say, then, two gentlemen with whom I am in company, and who were in the theatre to-night, have expressed a desire to see Clarice dance again, and, of course, to hear you sing again. I have consented—it is money in my pocket, and my honour is pledged. I will give you time to dress—I am thoughtful, you see. In half an hour I shall expect you and Clarice below; the woman will show you the way. Are you still rebellious ? Be careful ! ’

“ ‘ We will come,’ I said, ‘ if no harm is intended us.’

“ ‘ You are a fool ! No harm is intended. Answer instantly. You will come ? ’

“The door moved, obedient to his hand, and I knew that further opposition would bring him into the room.

“‘We will come,’ I said.

“‘I thought I should tame you,’ he said in a brutal tone. ‘If you thwart me again, you will live to rue it !’

“He hurried away, and as I listened to his retreating footsteps, it seemed to me that he was as anxious to be gone as I was to be rid of him. I turned to the woman ; she was gazing at me with a look of spiteful triumph on her face.

“‘If it is thus,’ I said, ‘that women assist women, it is better to trust to men.’

“‘You are a simpleton,’ she answered, ‘but you have spoken the truth. Women are not to be trusted.’

“‘We can get ready without your assistance,’ I said, and I bade her quit the room.

“She glanced around to assure herself that there was no chance of our escaping, and said, as she lighted my candle,—

“‘I shall wait outside for you.’

“I waited till she closed the door behind her. Then I stepped softly to the bedside.

“I had been so successful in controlling

my agitation that but little noise had been made. Clarice was a deep sleeper, as I had been before our master's conduct had aroused my suspicions; since that time the slightest sound had been sufficient to wake me.

"I knelt, and took my sister's hand in mine; her fingers fondly returned my loving pressure. She was in a peaceful sleep, and her curls hung loosely about her childlike face. No angel in heaven could present a more lovely appearance.

"'Clarice!' I called.

"She opened her eyes, and smiled at me.

"'Ah, Marguerite I was dreaming. It is not morning yet?'

"'No, my darling. What were you dreaming of?'

"'Heaven, I think. We were free, Marguerite, our own mistresses, and people were kind to us. Will it ever be?'

"'Yes, dear,' I said; 'wait till your prince appears. Perhaps you dreamt of him.'

"'I don't know,' she replied with a blush. 'Why did you wake me? You are dressed! Has anything happened?'

"Nothing to be alarmed at, dear. We

are to go down and perform. Our master insists upon it.'

" ' That is part of my dream, Marguerite, only our master was not present. We performed of our own free will before the gentlemen who were in the theatre last night.'

" ' Two who were there, Clarice, will not be denied the pleasure of seeing you again, and our master has consented. You will not speak to them, nor shall they to you, if I can prevent it. No harm can befall you while I am by your side.'

" Docile and obedient in this, as in all things, she submitted to be dressed, although she was scarcely awake; and when we were ready, she walked with me from the room, with her arm round my waist, and her head resting on my shoulder. How fair and lovely she looked as I supported her, in a half-dream, down the grand staircases to the saloon where our master and his master (for he did not deceive me; he was but a servant to these fine gentlemen) were waiting for us! The woman preceded us, and we met not a soul on the way. Never shall I forget that time. The silence, the dim, soft light, the ghostly

echo of our footsteps, inspired me with a superstitious dread of impending evil which I vainly tried to shake off. It appeared to me as if every representation of the human form we left behind us was following our steps with watchful eyes ; the statues in bronze and marble, the paintings on the walls and ceilings, seemed to be imbued with mysterious life.

“ ‘ In there, mistress,’ said the woman, and pushing us into a room, the door of which was partly open, she departed.

“ It was a large saloon, the greater portion of it in shadow. At one end, where lights were burning, sat our master playing cards with a gentleman, and, if his flushed face and excited manner were an index to feeling, playing for higher stakes than he could afford to lose. The gentleman was cool, unconcerned, and smiling, as was another, his friend, who was leaning back in his chair, idly watching the game.

“ ‘ Curse the luck ! ’ from our master.

“ ‘ With all my heart. Curse it ! ’ from the gentleman whose luck had been cursed.

“ ‘ Ah, here are our divinities ! ’ from the gentleman who was watching the game.

“ These exclamations fell upon my

ears as we entered. Clarice did not observe what was passing around us ; her eyes were closed, and, fearing that in a moment she would be fast asleep, I tightened my clasp upon her.

“ ‘Clarice,’ I whispered, ‘rouse yourself. We have work to do ; you must not sleep.’

“ She opened her eyes languidly, and closed them again with a charming smile.

“ ‘I cannot keep them open,’ she murmured ; ‘I shall be ready to dance when you want me. Let me dream.’

“ Some words which I did not catch passed between our master and the gentlemen.

“ ‘She can dance in shadow,’ said the gentleman who was not playing. ‘It will form a finer picture.’

“ Nevertheless, he came close to us with a five-branched candelabra containing lighted candles in his hand.

“ ‘Young ladies,’ he said in a courteous tone, ‘we could not rest until we had a further exhibition of your grace and skill. You will perform for us ? ’

“ ‘We have no option,’ I replied with spirit.

“‘ We should be loth to compel you to do what is disagreeable to yourselves,’ he said gently. ‘ Our friend the manager’ (by which I understood him to refer to our master) ‘ informed us that you would be delighted at the opportunity.’

“‘ Your friend, the manager,’ I said hotly, with the intention of exposing the falsehood, as I hoped, to our advantage, for I could not doubt that the speaker was a gentleman ; but I was prevented by an angry exclamation from our master, who, dashing a pack of cards to the ground in a fury, cried,—

“‘ The devil’s in the cards to-night ! ’

“ His adversary smiled superciliously, and I divined that he was playing with our master in more ways than one.

“ All this time the gentleman who held the candelabra was gazing earnestly upon Clarice’s face, which was lying upon my shoulder.

“‘ Rest awhile,’ he said, and with a light touch upon my arm, he encouraged me to sit upon a couch by which I was standing. Light as his touch was, and gently as I obeyed it, the motion disturbed Clarice, who opened her eyes ; they met those of

the gentleman, and some magnetic power in him prevented her from relapsing into her almost unconscious state. For a few moments they gazed at each other in silence, and then he moved suddenly away, and Clarice closed her eyes again with a happy sigh, and nestled in my arms.

“I can give only an imperfect account of the conversation that now took place between the men. The gentleman was for allowing us to rest; our master would not have it so.

“‘It is a debt of honour,’ he said with a swagger. ‘You asked me at what rate I valued the services of the girls. I told you—fifty pieces. You staked the money, and won.’

“‘But if we are willing to forego the claim? . . . not reasonable, perhaps. . . . I am to blame . . . so late an hour. . . . Clarice is almost asleep.’

“Then, from our master, with an oath: ‘I pay my debt. They shall sing and dance! . . . Another fifty pieces to let them off? Not double fifty. . . . They are mine—my slaves! How? I bought and paid for them! . . . The luck is against

me; it will turn it. You will give me my revenge ?'

" ' To the last drop of your blood,' said the imperturbable player; and added, looking at his friend, ' Let the girls dance; it will do them no harm.'

" ' Do you hear ?' cried our master to us. ' Dance and sing—I command you ! If the cards trick me, you shall not !'

" ' Scoundrel !'

" The exclamation was uttered by the gentleman who had interceded for us, and who now again approached us.

" ' There is no help for you,' said the gentleman to me; ' you will dance for us.'

" ' True, there is no help for us,' I answered bitterly; ' and if I do not thank you for your intended kindness, it must be because I am by nature ungrateful. Go to your friends; you are not needed here.'

" ' He says you are his slaves—by what right ?'

" ' I do not know ; the law has decided it. I fear that Clarice will not live to see the end of her term of slavery. As for me, it matters little ; I am strong, and can bear anything. Be kind enough to leave

us ; I do not forget that you are the cause of our being here at this hour.'

" He left me without reply, and rejoined the gamblers.

" When I had forced myself to calmness, I commenced my favourite song, and Clarice glided from my arms, and moved among the shadows, like one in a dream. It could scarcely be called dancing, but her movements were full of grace, and she inspired me with a fear similar to that I experienced on the first night of her recovery from her illness. I was not the only person in the room who experienced the feeling, for I heard the gentleman say,—

" 'I believe Clarice is a spirit, and that she will presently melt into thin air. Is not that what the poet says ? Our revels now are ended ! Friend manager, that part of your debt is paid.'

" Indeed, Clarice could dance no more. She sank upon the couch in a sleep so sound that I could not rouse her. It was not possible for me to carry her through the long passages and up the great staircases to our room, and I doubt, if I had attempted it, whether I should not have lost my way.

Besides, I also was overpowered with fatigue, and observing that we were now apparently unnoticed by the gentlemen, I knelt upon the ground, and placing my head upon the pillow by the side of Clarice, I soon was fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BETRAYAL.

“ How shall I describe what followed? A hundred times have I endeavoured to recall impressions and events in intelligible order, and a hundred times have I been baffled. I have said I was a light sleeper. What was it, then, that rendered me unconscious and powerless, when I should have been standing at my post like a faithful watch-dog to guard my lamb from the wolves ?

“ A cloak is thrown over us. I look up with eyes but half-open, and I see one of the gentlemen moving away. My impression is that he has been standing by our side for some little while, gazing at us. His action is kind and considerate, and I think of him with gentleness. In a pleasant way Clarice becomes associated with him, and a number of happy fancies present

themselves. While they are slipping from me and returning in fantastic shape, I hear these words :—

“ ‘I told you, to the last drop of your blood ! But if you sold yourself ten times over, you could not pay what you have already lost. . . . Doubt you ? Be reasonable, fellow. We trust only our equals.’

“ A hot retort ; a contemptuous allusion to the social position of my master ; and then a vision of three men—two with drawn swords, one standing by, amused at the unequal contest. For the furious thrusts of our master are parried with consummate grace and skill by his antagonist. A pass—another—and the brute lies on the ground, at the mercy of the gentleman.

“ ‘ Mercy ? It would be a charity to get rid of you.’

“ ‘ Leave him to me.’

“ ‘ My friend is on your side. I make you over to him. After all, I doubt whether you are worth the killing.’

“ Clarice and I are back in the old time, and are walking with our father through green lanes. It is a well-remembered

walk, beguiled with loving conversation. We stop for our mid-day meal outside a picturesque little inn, the porch of which is a bower of roses and honeysuckle. The mistress comes out, and gives us a jug of clear water, drawn from a spring. My father thanks her courteously, and she wishes to change the water for wine, but he will not have it so. We have just began to eat, when two poor girls, in comparison with whom we are princesses, pass us, with wistful eyes upon our food. My father calls them back immediately, and we share our meal with them. We question them concerning their history, and they tell us the story of their lives.

“‘‘Sisters ! No !’

“Who spoke ? Not my father, for he is gone ; the inn, the flowered porch, the children, have vanished.

“‘‘It will be a better kind of slavery than that to which. You dog ! I believe you stole her. You set a high price upon your wares ; but the texture is delicate, and its beauty not to be disputed. How you came to be the owner is one of the mysteries. Well, have

at you. I'll not dispute your price. Cut the cards.'

"Are the words really uttered, or created by my imagination? I cannot say; but spoken or not, they convey no warning to my mind. Blind watchdog! Sleeping at your post when you should have been awake and stirring! But you have been well punished for your neglect of a sacred trust.

"My dreams continue. We are all seated round the card-table—the gentlemen, our master, Clarice, and I. We girls watch the game curiously as though we are vitally interested in it. Piles of gold are before us, which the gentlemen, in sport, push into Clarice's lap. At first she is pleased, but when the gold rises higher and higher until she is completely hidden from my sight, she cries, 'Save me, Marguerite, save me!' As I am brushing the gold away, a church bell tolls the hour; one, two, three, four, and then these words come to me at intervals:—

"'Do not let it trouble you . . . Better my slave than yours . . . She shall be a queen! . . . Her clothes? . . . Twenty gold pieces! Well, I don't bargain. Cut again.' . . .

“ And now I am visited by a terrible fancy. Our master approaches Clarice, and is about to clasp her in his arms, when the gentleman with whom he has been playing advances to him threateningly. I also make an effort to protect Clarice, but I cannot move. I am bound to earth by an unseen agency. I struggle against it, but am unable to rise. A vapour floats across my face, and robs me of the power of thought. All surrounding objects slip from me; I hear nothing, see nothing, feel nothing. I am as one dead to the world.

* * * * *

“ It was late in the morning before I woke, and then I found myself lying on a couch in a better furnished room than the one we had occupied at the top of the house. The apartment was in semi-darkness, and the woman who had visited us on the previous night was looking down upon me. My mind was not yet quite clear ; my head ached, and my senses were in a strange state of confusion. I gazed at the woman in bewilderment ; she gave me a wicked smile, and I noticed that my ordinary clothes were hanging on her arm.

“‘ Quality hours, mistress,’ she said tauntingly, and her voice brought to my mind a full remembrance of her treacherous conduct towards my sister and myself.

“ I turned to speak to Clarice, and saw to my dismay that she was not by my side, nor in the room.

“‘ Where is my sister ?’ I cried, springing to my feet.

“ The woman did not answer the question.

“‘ Do you know what time it is ?’ she said. ‘ It is an hour past noon. What are you about to do, mistress ?’

“‘ I am going to my sister,’ I replied.

“ She barred the way, and I could not pass her.

“‘ You cannot leave the room in your stage dress. It would not be becoming.’

“‘ Where is my sister ?’ I asked again.

“‘ Safe enough, no doubt,’ she answered. ‘ Here are your clothes. Take off those silk trappings ; they are mine.’

“‘ Yours !’

“‘ Yes, mine. I bought them of your master, and paid for them.’

“‘ He sent you to me ?’

“‘I should not have come without orders. I am not in love with you, pretty as you think you are. Dress yourself quickly; your master is waiting for you.’

“With feverish haste I tore off my fine stage dress, and put on my common clothes.

“‘Now,’ I said, ‘take me to my master.’

“‘All in good time, my lady,’ she said, proceeding leisurely to fold up my stage dress; ‘I must be careful of my property. I’ll hire a dancing-girl of my own, and make money out of her. It would have been wise in you to have made me your friend.’

“My anxiety concerning Clarice was too deep to permit of my wrangling with the woman, who seemed to derive pleasure by prolonging my suspense. Presently she bade me follow her, and she led the way to a room where my master was sitting with an empty wine-bottle before him. His eyes were bloodshot, and his appearance was that of a man who had been for a long time without rest.

“‘Oh, you have come at last!’ he ex-

claimed, with a frown. ‘ You are a faithful servant, detaining me here for hours ! We ought to have been ten miles on the road by this time.’

“ ‘ We are going to leave the town, then ? ’ I said, looking round for Clarice.

“ He replied with a storm of curses upon the place and every person in it. “ I wish I had broken my neck before I came into the cursed hole ! May fire seize it, and burn it to ashes ! Come.’

“ ‘ I am ready. Where is Clarice ? ’

“ He was prepared with his answer. She has gone before us. If we are not sharp, we shall not overtake her.’

“ ‘ Gone before us ! ’ I echoed, struggling inwardly with a faintness which oppressed me, like the faintness of death. ‘ Alone ! ’

“ ‘ No ; with a friend, who offered me a seat for her in a waggon that was going our road. I am careful of my girls, you see.’

“ ‘ You entrusted Clarice to a stranger ! My sister, who has never been parted from me for an hour ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Why not ? It is time she learnt to depend more upon herself. She will not break, not being made of glass. If we

delay much longer, we shall not reach her to-night.'

"Swear to me that you are speaking the truth.'

"He crossed his heart, half in jest, half in earnest. 'I swear. And now let me have no more of your airs. Remember that you are my servant.'

"'I do remember,' I said, gazing steadily at him. 'If you are deceiving me, may your life be blighted and your death accursed!'

"'You may try my patience too far. Ask quickly what other questions you have to ask, and make an end of this.'

"'Where are the gentlemen with whom you were gambling last night?'

"'In the devil's clutches, I hope!'

"'Are they here now, and do they belong to this place?'

"'They do not belong to the town, and they left it at sunrise. Is that the last?'

"'Yes; I am ready. Let us go.'

"We went into the street, and at a signal from my master a small covered cart drew up. No person in the hotel took the slightest notice of us.

“‘Clarice could have accompanied us,’ I said, ‘as we are to ride.’

“‘If you were not eaten up with suspicion,’ said my master, ‘you would see that there is barely room for ourselves. Besides, when I sent Clarice off this morning, I thought you and I would have had to walk. You are grateful for kindness !’

“‘It is not without cause that I am suspicious. Shall we be certain to come up to Clarice to-night?’

“‘Not if we stand babbling here all day.’

“‘Forgive me; tell the man to drive quickly; we may overtake her on the road.’

“My master in a low tone gave instructions to the driver, and then assisted me into the cart. He arranged some straw for me to lie upon, and seating himself at the back of the conveyance, drew the canvas hood close, so that we were hidden from the people in the streets. The driver sat in front, and I crouched down behind him, in such a position that I could see the road before us. We drove fast, and were soon out of the town. The driver did not

speak to me, nor I to him, nor did he turn even to look at me. The paths we traversed were desolate and lonely, and the few human beings we saw tramping along were forlorn and wretched-looking. When we were twelve or fourteen miles from the town we came to a poverty-stricken inn, and the man stopped to give his horse food and water. My master got out to drink, and brought me some bread and cheese, which I could not eat. I so begrudged every moment of delay, that I fretted myself almost into a fever at the stoppage. If I had had money I would have given it to the man as a bribe not to linger ; having none, nor anything of value about me, no course was open to me but to wait for events. With what eagerness and anxiety did I now examine every conveyance we met and passed, asking my master if that or that was the conveyance which contained Clarice ! He had but one answer for me, ‘ No.’ He did not take the trouble to look up, and towards the evening he pretended to fall asleep, and spoke to me no more. I had plenty of time for thought, but, strive as I would, I could not recall events in intelligible sequence. All that

had passed during the last twenty-four hours was blurred and indistinct, and I found it impossible, although my mind was clearer now, to separate fancy from reality. One indelible impression, however, remained —that by some mysterious means I had been rendered unconscious, and that the sleep into which I had fallen was not naturally produced. I would not allow myself to get further than this; every suspicion that presented itself to me, based upon this conviction, I rejected with fierce vehemence. Evening passed, and night came on, and still no sign of Clarice; but my master had held out no hope that we should overtake her on the road. We must have ridden a great distance, for the driver did not spare his horse. On we drove, through the gloomy night, until we reached a small village, the few inhabitants of which had retired to rest. Every house was in darkness; not a sound was to be heard. We stopped at an inn, the driver jumped down, and my master assisted me to the ground.

“‘We shall rest here to-night,’ he said.

“‘Then Clarice is within?’ I asked.

“ ‘ She ought to be,’ replied my master, knocking loudly at the door.

“ The driver, after receiving some money from my master, jumped on to his cart and drove away. My master and I were alone.

“ In a few moments a fair-faced lout, but half-dressed, opened the door, and stood in the doorway, holding up a lamp to our faces.

“ ‘ What do you want ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ To rest here to-night,’ said my master ; ‘ we can pay for our accommodation.’

“ ‘ Enter.’

“ He made way for us, and I ran in, calling ‘ Clarice ! Clarice ! ’

“ ‘ Is the girl mad ? ’ exclaimed the landlord. ‘ Cease that noise ; you will wake my children.’

“ ‘ She is calling for her sister,’ said my master.

“ ‘ There is no sister of hers here.’

“ ‘ Who is in the house ? ’ asked my master.

“ ‘ No one but my wife and our children.’

“ ‘ Did not a waggon stop here this

evening, bringing a young woman, about sixteen years of age, who was to remain until we arrived ?'

"' Nothing of the sort. No waggon with a young woman has stopped at the house.'

"' But one might have passed.'

"' A dozen might have passed for all I know. What will you have to eat ?'

"' Anything you have got ; and bring me a bottle of red wine.'

"I was almost paralyzed with fear as I listened to this dialogue. My master put his questions in a careless tone, and received the answers with unconcern. What construction, but one that it maddened me to think of, could I place upon the situation in which I found myself? Clarice not here ! Torn from me, her only protector, herself a child, ignorant of the world's ways !— I confronted my master.

"' Explain this to me,' I said.

"His face grew dark with passion. ' Speak to me in a proper tone, Margaret.'

"' Tell me what this means !' I implored.

“‘That is better,’ he said. ‘I made arrangements that the three of us should start early this morning. I sent to rouse you half a dozen times, and each time the woman came back, saying she could not wake you. That was no fault of mine. Opportunity offering, I thought it best to send Clarice before us, as, in consequence of the lateness of the hour, I supposed our journey might be beyond her strength. I gave instructions to my friend the waggoner that if night fell before he reached this village he was to leave Clarice at this inn ; but if he had time, he was to go on to the next village, where I intend to put up for a day or two. As Clarice is not here, we shall find her further on. That is all.’

“‘That is not all,’ I said, my heart almost bursting out of my bosom ; ‘you are concealing something from me.’

“‘Think what you please,’ he retorted, shrugging his shoulders ; ‘it will not help you or Clarice. Do not mistake me—beyond certain limits you shall not go, without being made to feel it. I have been too easy with you hitherto.’

“‘I do not want to make you angry,’

I said humbly, subdued by the terror of the situation. ‘I know it will not help me. I only ask that Clarice shall be given back to me! I will work for you day and night—there is no task you set me to do that I will not perform ; you shall never hear another rebellious word from my lips ; indeed, indeed, no slave could be more submissive to you than I will be, if you will take me to my sister ! ’

“ ‘ I am glad to hear you speak in that manner,’ said my master. ‘ You have defied me too long, and I have borne it too quietly. Remain submissive and obedient ; it will be best for you. There is no doubt we shall see Clarice to-morrow. You have discovered, my girl, who is the strongest. Here is the landlord, with food and wine. Eat and drink. Obey me.’

“ What could I do ? What *could* I do ? Keep my agony to myself, conceal my fears, and endeavour to soften the heart of this man, who held me as completely in his power as though I were bound to him by an iron chain ! With tears running down my face I sat by his side, and ate a few morsels of food, endeavouring in a hundred

small ways to awaken some human sympathy in his breast for my almost unbearable sufferings.

“‘ What time shall we start in the morning ? ’ I asked.

“‘ At eight o’clock.’

“‘ Let us start at seven,’ I implored.

“‘ You shall be humoured, Margaret ; at seven, then.’

“‘ How can I thank you ? Is it far to the next village ? ’

“‘ Eighteen miles ; and we shall have to walk. You will need all your strength.’

“Ah ! he was cunning in his villainy. He turned my misery against myself, and made me feel that if I opposed his wishes I should prove myself an enemy to my sister. Our meal being finished, the landlord informed me that he had only one spare bedroom, which my master could occupy, and that I could sleep with his children. He showed me to the bedroom where his little girls were sleeping. Before leaving me, he stooped over the bed and kissed their pretty faces, and this natural and tender action flooded my eyes with fresh tears. I was so utterly alone—in a world of strangers, with no link of human

love but Clarice, who had been torn from me ! I thought of her desolation and despair at our separation, and of the unhappy night she was passing. She was awake, as I was, thinking of me, as I was of her. A small clock in a wooden case was on the mantelpiece, and I watched the hands until watching became a torture, they moved so slowly. Then I sank to my knees, and prayed, and with my thoughts concentrated upon the necessity of waking early, I fell into an uneasy slumber.

“At five o’clock in the morning I was standing outside the inn, in the light of the early sunrise. The presage of a fine day comforted me a little. ‘I shall see Clarice soon,’ I thought with gladness ; ‘I shall see Clarice soon !’ And I mentally vowed that, when she was once more within the shelter of my arms, nothing but death should ever again separate us. Never again should I be caught sleeping at my post. The place I was in was strange to me; I had no knowledge of the roads by which we had reached it, nor in which direction we should wend our way to Clarice. The conviction that

if I were left to myself I should be lost for ever was one of the acutest miseries of my position. I had absolutely no dependence but my master. ‘There is no doubt we shall see Clarice to-morrow,’ he had said. To-morrow had come, and in a few hours my sufferings would be over. I walked to a field, and picking a few wild flowers, made two posies, one for the landlord’s children, and one for my master. I must meet cunning with cunning. I placed the children’s posy in their room, and I gave the smaller bunch of flowers to my master, who was by this time awake and up. He received them with a smile, not of thankfulness, but of triumph, and stuck them in his hat.

“‘ You are growing sensible, Margaret,’ he said.

“ At seven o’clock, true to his promise, we started, and within an hour two lumbering vehicles passed us, going our road. I eyed them wistfully.

“‘ Can we not ride ? ’ I asked.

“‘ All my money has gone,’ he replied ; ‘I have barely enough to keep us for the week. We will ride and welcome, if you will pay for it.’

“ ‘ Alas ! ’ I said ; ‘ I have nothing.’

“ I was foolish enough to look wistfully along the road, in the absurd hope that a kind Providence would place a piece of gold there, to help us more quickly on the way. On and on we walked, he often lagging behind to try my patience ; but I uttered no word of complaint. Before noon, there was a change in the weather ; dark clouds had gathered, and the rain began to fall heavily. I was for walking on, heedless of the storm ; my master would not have it so. He stopped at the first hut we reached, and sought shelter within. This caused a delay of three or four hours, for he was deaf to all my entreaties, saying there was time enough, and that we should arrive at our destination by night. In the afternoon we started again, the rain being over, and shortly after nightfall our weary walk was done. There were many houses and people in the village, and it was altogether more important than the one we had left behind. ‘ Clarice is there ! ’ I whispered to myself. ‘ Thank God, we shall presently be together.’ And I said aloud to my master,—

“ ‘ Where shall we find my sister ? ’

“ ‘ At the Salutation Inn ! ’

“ ‘ Have you been in this place before ? ’

“ ‘ Once, years ago. My friend told me he knew the inn well.’

“ His ready answers confirmed my hopes ; I had tortured myself with needless fears.

“ ‘ We cannot put up at the Salutation,’ he said ; ‘ we must seek cheaper accommodation. My purse has little enough in it.’

“ There was no difficulty in discovering what he sought—a poor inn, frequented by the needy.

“ ‘ This will suit,’ he said, ‘ and I dare-say we can raise a little money by our performances. Remain here ; I will bring Clarice to you.’

“ He would not allow me to accompany him. Alone he went ; alone he returned. His face was troubled, his manner confused, and I did not pause to consider whether he had schooled himself into this expression of feeling.

“ ‘ Great God ! ’ I cried, ‘ where is Clarice ? ’

“ ‘ She has not been seen,’ he replied suddenly. ‘ I do not understand it. Why

should she have taken it into her head to run away from so loving a sister ?'

"The truth flashed upon me in a moment. We had been betrayed.

"' You villain ! ' I exclaimed. ' You shameless villain ! O, that I were a man, to punish you for your treachery ! '

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET TIGHTENS THE CHAINS WHICH BIND
HER TO SLAVERY.

"OF what passed between us immediately after this I have but an indistinct remembrance, my agitation was so great. I know that one moment I accused my master of the blackest treachery, and the next entreated him upon my knees to tell me where I could find Clarice ; I know that he made lame attempts at explanation, which I refused to accept, and that in the end he struck me, and forcing me into a small room, turned the key upon me. There was a bed in the room, but I did not seek repose ; through that long, long night I sat in the dark, or walked about the room, asking myself what I could do to rescue my sister, and what motive my master could have had in getting rid of one who was useful and profitable to him.

I could find no answers to my torturing questions. All that I could do was to suffer and wait.

“In the morning my master came to the door.

“‘Are you up?’ he called.

“‘Yes,’ I answered.

“He unlocked the door. I ran out to him; there was still a lingering hope. Clarice might have arrived during the night.

“‘Has she come?’ I cried eagerly.

“‘Have you heard anything of her?’

“‘I have heard nothing of her.’ He looked at me keenly. ‘You have not slept.’

“‘How could I sleep in such agony and suspense as I am suffering?’

“‘It will not help you to find Clarice,’ he said.

“‘I wish I could die!’ I exclaimed despairingly.

“‘That will not help you to find Clarice.’

“‘You really mean it?’ I implored.
‘You wish to find her? You will try to
find her?’

“‘Without doubt I shall, unless you

continue to thwart me. You are a bad reasoner, Margaret. Did not Clarice put money in my pocket, and did you ever know me go against my own interests ?'

" He had breakfast placed before me, and stood over me while I forced myself to eat; indeed, I was compelled to eat, having partaken of so little food during the last two days. Then he bade me accompany him, and to my surprise took me to the office of a magistrate, where he made a formal complaint of the abduction of Clarice, his apprentice. He gave a minute description of Clarice, and of the man into whose care he had confided her, of the waggon which conveyed her away, of his instructions to the man, of his inability to discover any trace of him, and of my prostration and grief at my sister's disappearance. I listened in amazement. He spoke with such an assumption of sincerity and sorrow that it was scarcely possible for a stranger to disbelieve him.

" His statement was taken down in writing, and he was informed that the law could not assist him until he discovered the person into whose charge he had given his apprentice.

“‘ It shall be the business of my life to find and punish him,’ said my master, ‘ and to restore Clarice to the arms of her unhappy sister.’

“ The magistrate complimented him upon his humanity, and me upon having so kind-hearted a master and guardian. He was, indeed, too strong and cunning for me.

“ When we left the magistrate’s office, my master said,—

“‘ Margaret, it is time we came to an understanding. You did not sleep last night. Why?’

“‘ I am very unhappy,’ I replied, ‘ and I could not sleep.’

“‘ You passed the time in thinking what it was best for you to do to find Clarice?’

“‘ Yes.’

“‘ I also have been thinking seriously of that—as I have proved by my visit to the magistrate this morning—and of the relations in which you and I stand to each other. They do not satisfy me.’

“‘ Neither do they satisfy me.’

“‘ You do not trust me.’

“ I was silent; with Clarice in my mind,

I felt it would not be prudent to anger him too far.

“‘It is clear that you are determined not to do me justice, and that you are tired of me. Well, I am also getting tired of you. You pine for liberty. I give it to you. Do you understand me?’

“‘Not quite,’ I replied, with inward fear.

“‘Yet it is not difficult. I have a legal claim upon you by which I can compel you to work for me until you are twenty-one years of age; I am willing to relinquish that claim. You look upon your servitude with me as a kind of bondage; I offer you release from a hateful slavery. If you so decide it, you are free to go. I shall require you to sign a paper to the effect that you leave me of your own accord, and that you will never trouble me again; and this night, if you wish, shall terminate our partnership.’

“I was so confounded by this unexpected proposal, made apparently in a frank spirit, that I could not find words to reply.

“‘I intend,’ continued my master, ‘to

have this matter settled immediately. I will no longer put up with your whims and caprices. I give you till six o'clock to reflect and decide ; if before that time you do not come to me, either to agree to my offer or to promise to be more submissive to me in the future, I will take effectual means to rid myself of you. You have sense as well as spirit, and I think you can see that I am in earnest.'

" ' If I resolve to leave you,' I said, ' will you give me a small sum of money to help me on ? '

" ' Not the smallest coin,' he replied, ' and for the best of all reasons—I am absolutely a beggar.'

" ' And I should never see you more ? '

" ' Never, if I could help it.'

" ' Would you continue your search for my sister ? '

" ' Certainly.'

" ' And if you found her ? '

" I paused, in great agitation. Never till this moment had I realized how completely this man held me in his power.

" He repeated my words.

" ' And if I found her ? Well ? '

" ' Would you restore her to me ? '

“‘ You must think me a dull-brained idiot, indeed! Clarice is worth her weight in gold to me.’

“‘ You know that my heart, my life, are bound up in Clarice, and by force you would keep her from me?’

“‘ Still unreasonable, Margaret,’ he said in a cold tone of displeasure. ‘ It is not I who would keep her by force from you; it is you who, by your own deliberate act, will decree the separation. A little reflection will lead you to a clearer view of the case. You have told me in numerous offensive ways that I am acting the part of a tyrant to you; I am, after all, a man of feeling—that is, I am not entirely a log of wood, without sensation. Matters have gone on most unpleasantly for many months, until at length they have come to a crisis, and I offer you what you sigh for, your freedom. Upon this, you accuse me of further cruelty. There is no pleasing or satisfying you, one way or another, and I am resolved that our relations shall come to an end or be placed upon a better footing. What is more, I will have no trickery. You have six hours before you for decision. I shall remain

about the inn till six o'clock ; if you do not come to me before that hour is passed, I shall adopt what course I deem best.'

"' If,' I said timidly, 'I, being alone, should by some good fortune find Clarice, would you take her from me ?'

"' She is my apprentice, and I can claim her whenever I have the opportunity. I can give you up more easily than I could Clarice. But make your mind easy. Without my aid, your chances of ever seeing Clarice again would not be worth a breath of air.'

" By this time we had reached the inn, and there my master left me. I entered the room in which I had been made a prisoner the previous night, and endeavoured to think ; but my mind was in a whirl, and the narrow space seemed to add to my confusion. I went into the open, and under the better influence of sweet air, which cooled my hot face, and bright skies, which whispered hope and comfort, I schooled myself into a calmer mood. I did not forget that the good Lord was over all, and that faith in Him would surely help me in my great trouble. I bowed my head and prayed, and my mind

became clearer. That my master would be as good as his word, and would give me my freedom if I wished, I saw no reason to doubt; I was not so certain that he really wished to rid himself of me, for if he desired it, he could do so without difficulty, by simply leaving me on the road. It forced itself upon me that by accepting his offer of liberty I should be depriving myself of the only link that might lead me to Clarice. It might be that the entire affair was a trick—that he himself had planned the separation, and had conducted matters to their present crisis, so that I should of my own doing destroy any claim I had upon him, and leave him free to travel with Clarice wherever he wished. I shuddered at the thought. Helpless, friendless as I was, the reflection that absolutely my only chance of finding Clarice was by remaining with my master and keeping watch over him, grew gradually into a conviction. To beat despairingly against the bars would not assist me—coolness, watchfulness, submission might. Upon this decision I acted at once. I sought my master, and found him, as usual, playing cards with two or three village louts. He

threw up the cards and came to me at once.

“‘ I have made up my mind,’ I said.

“‘ To what effect?’

“‘ To remain with you.’

“‘ And be submissive?’

“‘ Yes.’

“‘ You are wise, in your own interest, perhaps not so much in mine. But I am a man always prepared to do my duty. I have drawn up two papers, in one of which you ask for your freedom and I give it to you, on the condition that you never trouble me again. That, I tear up.’ He did so. ‘ This other paper is to the effect that you bind yourself afresh to me, that, in full knowledge of all the circumstances that have passed, you are satisfied that my conduct is that of an honourable man, and that you promise to obey me in all reasonable ways. Will you sign it?’

“‘ Yes. You will do your best to recover Clarice?’

“‘ I promise you.’

“ He called the landlord to witness my signature, and thus I bound myself afresh to an abhorred slavery.

“ From that time to this I have never

seen Clarice, nor am I acquainted with the smallest detail of her life since we were so cruelly, so wickedly parted. My master and I travelled from place to place in the old way, and he made what use he could of the gifts I possess. By my services we have managed to live in a poor fashion; we might, I doubt not, have done better so far as the earning of money goes, but my master appears to have lost all spirit since the fatal night from which my thoughts never wander. He lays the blame upon Clarice, and says that she has ruined his career. For the first few months my master used to come to me with accounts of rumours he had heard that a girl answering to the description of Clarice had been seen in such or such a place, and to that place we made all haste, to learn that the rumours were false. My master insists upon it that Clarice has been stolen and sold to some travelling company, the manager of which takes pains to avoid us, or that she is now in another country, entirely out of our reach. Lately he has treated me more harshly than he has ever done before, and a dozen times a day tells me I am the curse of his life.

But although I am frightened of him it seems to me that I must remain with him until he casts me from him, or until I am dead. It is the only way in which I can prove that I am faithful to Clarice. We are now without food or money, and he told me this afternoon that he could not afford to pay for lodgment for us to-night. That is why I am staying in this forest, living upon a hope that is dead, and tempted to believe that it would be better for me to put an end to my life than linger on in this state of exquisite suffering. It is impossible for me to say whether my master's story that Clarice has been stolen from us is true or false; it is impossible for me to know whether he has ever uttered one word of truth with relation to my dear, my darling sister, and whether he has not led me from place to place upon invented rumours. My cup of sorrow is full, and I do not know which way to turn for a crumb of comfort."

CHAPTER XI.

WELCOME TO THE SILVER ISLE.

“THIS,” said Matthew Sylvester to those inhabitants of the Silver Isle whom he had chosen to hear the story of Margaret, “is the account I received from Margaret’s lips of her trials and sufferings. As I have told you, I wrote it down at her dictation in after-times, with but little alteration, so that some record should be kept of what struck me as a very pitiful and pathetic story. As I listened to her that night in the forest my sympathy for her was great. Every word she uttered bore the impress of truth, and only a thoroughly good woman could have expressed such unselfish love and devotion as she expressed for Clarice. Many times in the course of the narration did she stop and listen, thinking she heard the step or the voice of her master, but he did

not make his appearance, and she finished her story without interruption. If I had not already gathered from her description of her master that he was in heart and soul an irreclaimable scoundrel, I should have known it from the fact of his leaving a young girl like Margaret alone and unprotected in such a lonely spot; it was the act of a man devoid of common humanity. But I had formed my idea of him long before Margaret had finished, and my experience of human nature enabled me to arrive nearer to the truth with respect to his dealing with Clarice than Margaret could or dared suspect. With a true pity for the forlorn and desolate girl, I made up my mind to rescue her from her perilous and wretched position. I asked her if, when her master left her, he had promised soon to return, but she could give no information beyond that he said he was going into the town to endeavour to get food or money. Upon that I pointed out to her that it was not likely he would return before morning, and that the best thing she could do would be to accompany me to the inn, and accept of my protection. At first I could not persuade her; she

feared ill-treatment in case her master returned and did not find her. I pledged her my word that she should not be ill-treated, and said that my son and I would protect her.

“ ‘I know more of the law than you do,’ I said, ‘and I am convinced that I can release you from the tyranny of this villain. That it is your best course to leave him I am satisfied—as satisfied as I am that, if you remain with him till death severs the connection, you will never hear one true word from his lips concerning your sister.’

“ Her tears flowed at this bitter but necessary assurance, and I stood by her side in silence while she debated within herself. Suddenly she turned her eyes full upon my face, and said,—

“ ‘Why do you urge me to this? You have never seen me before. What motive have you for wishing me to leave my master?’

“ Margaret is a woman with a straight mind, friends, as you will discover for yourselves if we remain with you. I was pleased at this rough frankness.

“ ‘My child,’ I said to her in reply, ‘I have a sincere pity for you; you have stirred my

heart. That in itself would be a sufficient motive, but I have a more selfish one. My son and I, leading just such a wandering life as you have done, would find it lightened and made happier if we had a woman with us. I can see many pleasant pictures in the companionship. I will be a father to you, my son shall be your brother. It is certain you will receive from us affection and fair treatment. You will earn your bread as we do. You will not be a slave; you will be free to go if you find our company distasteful to you. We travel into parts of the country where it is more likely you will learn something of your sister, if there is anything to learn, than you can possibly do in your present circumstances. For the rest, if you cannot read sincerity in my face I am powerless to convince you of my honesty of purpose.'

"She placed her hand in mine, and saying she would trust me, accompanied me to the inn, where I made arrangements for her repose. I was up early in the morning, in the confident expectation of seeing Margaret's master. Surely enough, he accosted me the moment I put my face outside the inn door.

“‘ You brought a girl called Margaret here last night,’ he said.

“‘ I did,’ I replied. ‘ I brought her from the forest, where you had left her without food or protection. You cannot justify yourself.’

“‘ I am not called upon to do so by you,’ he retorted. ‘ I did not leave her alone for longer than a quarter of an hour.’

“‘ An untruth,’ I said ; ‘ but that is not to the point. I intend to take Margaret from your charge. You are not fit to have the care of a young girl, and this one shall no longer remain with you.’

“I spoke boldly, knowing it was the only way with such a man as he.

“‘ How do you propose to deprive me of my property?’ he asked, with a covert look at me, measuring my power, as it were.

“‘ By purchase,’ I said ; ‘ and if that is not to your liking, by means which will place you in the clutches of the law. You are not in flourishing circumstances. How much for the release of this girl? Not, mark you, that I acknowledge your right to her. I can prove the con-

trary, or a lawyer can do it for me; but I am willing to settle the matter amicably, without the aid of a third person. Name a sum, and let it be small, or you will get nothing, for the release of Margaret. Such a man as yourself does not want to be encumbered with a woman who hates and fears you. Name your price, and try your luck with it at the nearest gaming-table.'

"He caught at the bait, and named a sum not beyond my means. I agreed to pay it to him, and we adjourned for the purpose of drawing up such an agreement as I considered binding. I saw that the fellow was tired of Margaret, and that, setting aside a small feeling of personal vindictiveness which belonged to his mean nature, he was glad of the opportunity of ridding himself of her on terms so favourable. So as to place Margaret entirely out of his power I went to a notary, and had the agreement attested; in effect, it was a transfer of apprenticeship, by which for a certain sum Margaret's master relinquished all claim upon her future services. This business concluded, I said to the man,—

"‘It is not likely you or I will ever meet again; if we are in the same neigh-

bourhood, we shall be glad to avoid each other. Do one gracious act. Tell me what has become of Clarice, and whether I can adopt any means to bring her and Margaret together.'

"He eyed me narrowly, and said, 'I will sell what I know.'

"'You have some information to give, then?'

"'I have.'

"I took from my pocket a gold piece, and offered it to him, but the wretch was greedy, and haggled; however, by diplomatic conduct, I convinced him that I would give no more, and he agreed to accept it.

"'How I know what I know,' he said, 'is my secret, which no man can buy. Only in one way can Margaret and Clarice ever be brought together again.'

"'Tell it me.'

"'Death's way. Clarice is dead.'

"'You are not lying?' I asked, shocked and startled by the news, and by the callous tone in which it was conveyed.

"'I have no purpose to serve. The girl is dead.'

"'When did this occur?'

“ ‘ Shortly after Clarice’s disappearance. I learnt it by accident.’

“ ‘ Why did you not tell Margaret ? ’

“ ‘ I should have lost my hold upon her ; there would have been no bearing with her. She has troubled me enough.’

“ I could get no further information from him, and we parted, never to meet again.

“ I determined to keep the news from Margaret, at least for a time. All that I told her upon my return to the inn was that she was free, and that her master had no further claim upon her. I was glad to see that she and Paul had already become friends.

“ ‘ You are now your own mistress,’ I said, ‘ and are at liberty to decide for yourself. Will you join us ? We shall soon discover whether we suit each other.’

“ She replied that she was happy in the prospect I held out to her, and so the compact was made.

“ The companionship was in every respect agreeable, and we continued our wandering life, living from hand to mouth, seldom grumbling at the bad fortune

which pursued us and kept our pockets empty. There were others worse off than we were. It is a hard world out there, friends ; harder for the weak than the strong—harder, I believe, for the pure at heart than the cunning ones who avoid the straight path upon which the full sun-light shines.

“ Then happened a natural thing. In the springtime of life love-buds prepare to blossom. Margaret and Paul were drawn to each other, and sometimes, unconscious to themselves, walked hand-in-hand. It gladdened me to watch the growth of love between two beings who were dear to me ; for the more I learned of Margaret’s nature the better I appreciated her, and the stronger grew my respect and admiration for her character. Never for an hour did she forget Clarice ; the dear name was constantly on her lips. In the midst of her enjoyment of the passing time she would pause and sigh : ‘ Ah, if Clarice were here ! ’ and would reproach herself for feeling light-hearted in the absence of her beloved sister. Often did I ask myself whether it would not be more merciful to acquaint her with the truth, and as often

did I shrink from the sad task. She had one intense desire—to visit once more the town in which Clarice had been torn from her ; but her description of the place was so vague that it was long before we were enabled to decide in what direction it lay. The moment we ascertained with some degree of certainty, we directed our steps thitherwards. At the same time I resolved that when we reached that abode of sad memories I would inform Margaret of her sister's death. We arrived in the town, and at Margaret's request I made inquiries after Clarice. I might as well have spoken in an unknown tongue. Not a soul remembered her, or could give the slightest information with respect to her. The town was a fashionable one, frequented by tourists chiefly of the better class, who flowed in and out like a constant tide. We stayed there for three days, and when we had left it behind us, I gently broke the melancholy news to Margaret. I cannot describe her grief ; it was so sharp and despairing as to cause me for a time to fear for her reason. Had she not been with us, I believe she would have sought relief in death. But love and sympathy lightened

her sorrow, and in the course of time she grew calmer. She will never forget Clarice. Old as she may live to be, the memory of that dearly-beloved sister will never fade from her mind.

“Friends, I have but little more to say. Margaret returned Paul’s love, and they were married. Fortune, as I have told you, has not been kind to us, and Margaret, who will soon become a mother, yearned for a more peaceful life. Many a time did I describe to her the sweet repose I enjoyed here in my youthful days, and at length decided to come and ask you to receive us. It may be that the restless career we have led may have unsettled us for the quiet life of this lovely isle. But let us try. Briefly let me say—not in praise of ourselves, but as simple matters of truth—that Margaret is a woman who deserves to be loved, and that since I last bade you farewell I have done no act which should make me ashamed to grasp the hands of old comrades in friendship.”

* * * *

The islanders had listened to Matthew Sylvester’s story in silence and with earnest

attention, and now that his recital was finished, they rose and said,—

“Resume your old-life place among us. We welcome you and yours, Matthew Sylvester.”

CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET'S DIARY, WRITTEN IN THE SILVER
ISLE.

"AFTER a lapse of eight peaceful years the wound I received when a girl by the loss of my darling Clarice, and which, but for my dear husband and his father, would assuredly have caused my death, has been suddenly and strangely torn open. Not that it is possible I could ever forget Clarice. No ; to the last hour of my life she will be with me in spirit, loved and mourned. But the love of my family and the wise counsel of Matthew Sylvester, whom I now call father, have brought to my soul a resignation which has contributed to my enjoyment of life and has enabled me to fulfil its duties. The living have claims upon me as well as the dead. My husband, Paul, our father, the good Matthew, and my two dear children, Joseph and Gabrielle, are with me,

filling my life with cares and joys ; and now there is another, a stranger, a child called Evangeline, who has made my heart bleed afresh. At times I feel that my dear sister is by my side, and that I have but to turn, to clasp her once more in my arms, and to hear her sweet voice address me by the name of Marguerite.

“ It is night. Our children and Evangeline are asleep ; my husband and father are absent, and will not be home till late. I have often intended, for my own guidance, to place upon paper a brief statement of the events affecting myself that have occurred during my residence in this place, together with impressions and fancies which have strongly affected me. I will take advantage of the present opportunity, and will write down as clearly as I am able a statement of what has passed since I first set foot upon the shores of the Silver Isle.

“ From my window I can see the fateful mountain with its snow-clad crown, shunned by all on the isle, because of the fearful story connected with it. The legend of Evangeline and the two brothers was related to me soon after my arrival on the isle ; I was strangely fascinated by it.

By some untenable process of thought I connected the fate of Evangeline with that of my dear sister Clarice ; there is no explainable reason for the connection, except that they were both young and fair and dearly beloved, and met their fate through treachery. Looking out now, I see a shadow moving up the heights. I cannot clearly discern the figure, but I know it to be the shadow of Ranf the deformed, who brought the child Evangeline to this peaceful land, and left her in my care. No other being would have the courage to tread the upward path.

“I think, but for my urging, we should have remained in the old world, and at this present moment be following our wandering life. But the accounts of this isle related to me from time to time by Matthew Sylvester took a powerful hold of my imagination. The land he described was more like dreamland than reality, and it was at my earnest solicitation we came. I was harassed by the uncertainties of our career ; our fortunes were too often at a low ebb, and I expected in a few months to become a mother. I thought it would be a happy augury for my child to be born

in a land of peace, within hail of kind souls who, if anything happened to me, would, for the sake of Matthew, protect the innocent being from the storms of the world. So with many a sigh (for there had been happiness as well as anxiety in our days) we bade adieu to old associations, and turned our faces hitherwards.

“The manner in which we were received did not please me, and I was beset by fears that I had been unwise in my desire. The isle was fair and beautiful, but there was a restraint in the bearing of the islanders, who, while welcoming Matthew Sylvester and my husband as friends having a claim upon them, appeared to regard me with coldness. Stranger as I was, I expected that they would immediately hold out to me the cordial hand, because of my relations with the Sylvesters. In this I was unreasonable. It was natural that they should wait to learn from personal experience whether I was worthy of their friendship, which, as I now know, once given is never withdrawn without just cause. The men and women of this isle are of a more simple and therefore higher nature than those of the countries in which

my life had hitherto been passed. They do not live only for the hour ; the interest they take in each other is earnest and enduring, and I hold them in high regard. The feeling is mutual, I hope, but before I was satisfied of its existence on their part, I was unhappy.

“The fault was in myself. I held my feelings in reserve, and even when the women came to me, on the first night of our arrival, with gifts of food and offers of assistance, I received them, I am afraid, in an ungracious spirit. They did not, however, relax in their kind endeavours to make me feel at home among them. Still I was not softened ; I experienced a kind of resentment at the thought that I was in a certain way on my trial before the islanders. I expressed this to my husband.

“‘It will be honest, Paul, that I should show them the worst side of my nature. They will not then be able to say that I practised deceit.’

“‘Be yourself, Margaret,’ replied my husband ; ‘what you feel, show. Of all the places in the world, this is the last in which a man should wear a mask,

whether for attraction or repulsion. Do justice to us and to yourself.'

"'In what way?'

"'By being natural.'

"Upon Matthew's return on that first night from his long interview with his friends, in which I understood he had given an account of our wanderings, and, I doubt not, some flattering descriptions of me (which again caused resentment in me), he told us that the welcome accorded to us was genuine and hearty, and that the house we now occupy was to be ours as long as we choose to remain. It is a large and most beautiful residence, perhaps the best on the Silver Isle, and the fact of its being given so generously, should have convinced me of the goodness of the islanders; but I was in a rebellious, querulous mood that night. The house belongs to a gentleman named Mauvain, who sought refuge on the isle when he was in danger of his life through political troubles, and when he left, after a sojourn of many years, he gave the islanders free use of it until he or some person authorized by him should appear to claim it. In that event, although I shall be sorry to change

my residence, having grown attached to the home, it will not be a matter of serious importance to us. We are now in a position to build a house for ourselves, having become so by our own labour.

“That was a momentous question. How were we to live ?

“‘We cannot eat the bread of idleness,’ I said.

“‘Surely not,’ said Matthew merrily. ‘What, then, shall we do ? Make a start with drum and castanets ? How they would gape and stare to hear us mouth and rant ! We should have an audience, Margaret ; the children would run after us all over the isle.’

“‘And their mothers,’ I said, with a grimace, ‘would ever after lock them up the moment we showed our faces. However, I believe I shall never be contented here until we show ourselves to your friends in our true colours. They must know us as we are, father.’

“‘I am of your mind, Margaret. I do not intend to give up old ways entirely ; I have my plans in more ways than one. But make your mind easy ; our path is clear before us. Trust Matthew

Sylvester. He has not roamed the world for nothing.'

"Then he explained how his father had been a famous fisherman, and had taught him the cunning of the art, and how, during his absence from the Silver Isle, he had taken attentive note of the better kind of fishing-tackle used in the countries they had travelled over.

"'We will teach them this and other things,' said Matthew, 'both useful and entertaining. I can show them rare improvements in rod and reel, and especially in the art of making artificial flies. I have spoken of it already, and my ideas have been well received. Paul and I will set to work presently.'

"They went to work at once, and we were soon placed in a position of independence. These seem trivial matters to mention here, but they were serious to me at the time, and I took them much to heart.

"It troubled me that for a time only elderly people visited our house. I love the society of the young, and it pained me that the children of the isle did not seek my friendship. I cannot describe how

gentle and patient Matthew was with me during these rebellious moods. He schooled me to patience and to a better understanding of things, and insisted that his friends showed a wise discretion in their behaviour.

“‘Sudden affection,’ he said, ‘is not the most lasting. The people of the isle build upon sure foundations, and for my part I am satisfied with their conduct. But our first consideration is your happiness. The world is open to us to return to it if we choose, and choose we shall, if you are not contented here. Let us, however, give the new life a fair trial, and not burden it with fancied ills. Precious stones have often been thrown away in haste. Trust me, Margaret ; if you are patient, you will win both old and young.’

“His words, thank God, proved true. Gradually the people grew to love me, and trusted their children with me. Their hearts were not hard to win, and our house became their favourite resort. Then I had a new care and joy to occupy my mind ; my baby would soon be born.

“I yearned for a girl, whom I could love as I had loved Clarice. I fondly hoped that

my child would resemble Clarice, and indeed believed it would be so.

“‘ We will call her Clarice,’ said my husband.

“ I would not have it so. My child should not bear my sister’s name ; it might carry with it a bad omen.

“ But my firstborn was a boy, and we named him Joseph. I felt no disappointment ; I was fully, perfectly happy. He did not resemble me in feature ; he favoured my husband’s family.

“ From this time it was that I began to be assured of the enduring affection of the islanders. Had I been closely allied to them by blood, they could not have shown me greater kindness. My mind was more composed ; my joy in my child was great, and I said to my husband,—

“‘ I shall be content to live and die upon this happy isle.’

“ This better state of contentment had its origin partly in a dream I dreamt shortly after I became a mother.

“ A dearer life than mine was in my arms ; gazing upon my child with an exquisite sense of gratitude to God, I fell into a happy sleep.

"A fair white snow-land rose before me, high up in the heavens. It was the basin of eternal snow I see now from my window. All the world was asleep, and this lovely work of Nature rose before me in perfect peace and purity. Beyond it stretched the calm and beautiful ocean. Not a ripple disturbed its breast. No sound fell upon my ears, not the rustle of a leaf.

"Thus I lay, as it seemed for hours, with a heaven of rest in my heart.

"Suddenly I saw a figure standing upon the peak of the snow-mountain, the figure of a girl clad in white, with a girdle of roses round her waist. I knew it to be the figure of that Evangeline with whose sad story I had been made familiar. She turned towards me, and pointed to the ocean, upon whose eastern edge a golden light was rising. And in that golden light another figure appeared, the figure of Clarice.

"Across the sea she came, with the spreading of golden beams, until she reached the snow-land upon which Evangeline stood. Then, hand in hand, they gazed at me with tender smiles, and sank

into the basin of snow, which now lay like a ruby cup in the eye of the rising sun.

“ I was comforted at the time by this dream. It was as though Clarice were with me upon the Silver Isle. The sea no longer separated us.

“ This comforting impression was not permanent. Fancies of a gloomier nature have since oppressed me, and nearly all, strange to say, connected in some way with the mountain of snow. Sometimes Clarice seemed to reproach me for having deserted her; but what could I do? Would I not have sacrificed my life for her? Oh, my dear, dear sister! what trials were yours before your sufferings were ended by death! Shall I ever learn the history of your sad fate?

“ It is but lately she appeared to me in a terrible dream. She had grown old, haggard, wrinkled, and was dragging her weary feet over a stony road, leaving behind her marks of blood. She was hungry, and parched with thirst. I ran towards her with a cup of water, calling, ‘ Clarice! Clarice! ’ She turned at my cry, and dashed the cup of water from my hands. ‘ You betrayed and deserted me! ’

she cried. ‘I am not dead. I am living in hopeless misery !’

“Thank God, it was only once she appeared to me in this guise ! Were such dreams frequent, they would drive me mad.

“In setting down these fancies in this place I am losing the sequence of events. I must return to the time when my baby was born.

“He was three months old, and I was in perfect health, when Matthew informed me that he had written a play which he intended we should represent to our friends. He had mentioned the matter to them, and although a few of the elder people had doubts, he had argued them down, and they not only consented that the experiment should be made, but promised to be present on the occasion.

“It was, after all, an innocent experiment, and was the means of introducing a new kind of amusement into the Silver Isle.

“During my illness Paul and Matthew had transformed a large spare room into a miniature theatre, had raised a stage, fixed a curtain, and painted a scene in

which the action of our little play was to occur. We were all anxious as well as curious concerning the result, and on the appointed evening our house was filled with visitors. The old people were grave, the young were in a flutter of excitement. Such an entertainment had never been given upon the Silver Isle. The room was well lighted, and there were seats for more than a hundred persons.

“What were the feelings of the islanders as they sat in mute expectation before the green curtain it is impossible for me to say. I know what mine were. I felt inclined to laugh and cry at the same time.

“The play was a very simple affair. The characters represented were a sailor and his wife, allotted to Paul and me, and an old sailor, played by Matthew. Our baby also took part in the performance. The scene was a room in the young sailor’s house near the sea-coast. Happiness and contentment reigned in the humble household. The young husband was on the eve of departure on a voyage which was expected to last eight or nine weeks. There was pleasant talk about the sea, in lan-

guage really poetical, between the three of us. This was to be my husband's last voyage; upon his return he would have enough money to buy a fishing-boat, which was to supply the future means of livelihood. After a tender parting he left us, saying he would be with us again before baby was born. 'And what is baby's name to be?' asked the old sailor. Outside was heard the distant voice of my husband, singing a song of farewell. I answered him in his favourite song. This ended the first part of the play.

"From the buzz of delight we heard among the audience, we augured that we were producing a pleasing effect. The second part commenced at the time my husband's ship was expected home. The old sailor and I indulged in fond anticipations, and mapped out a happy future. The old sailor left me to endeavour to pick up some news about my husband. 'I will bring him back with me,' he said. While he was absent I arranged the room in the way that would give my husband most pleasure. I had bought tobacco for him and a new pipe, and had knitted him a purse, which I placed upon the table in a

dozen different ways, so as to make them attractive in his eyes, singing softly to myself as I shifted the things this way and that. The door was slowly opened, and the old sailor entered, alone. Had he heard news of my husband ? He answered softly, yes. Then he would be here soon, or perhaps he was hiding behind the door ? I ran to the door and opened it. My husband was not there. Then gradually the sad news was told. I should never see my husband more. His ship had been wrecked, and every soul on board lost. The curtain fell upon an outburst of passionate grief.

“ ‘ You have touched them, Margaret,’ said Matthew ; ‘ half the house is in tears.’

“ There had been another lapse of time when the curtain was drawn aside for the last part of the play. My baby was born, and I sat with him on my lap, singing of the cruel sea which had robbed him of his father. The old sailor could not comfort me ; charged with the happy news which was to make the play end with smiles instead of tears, he did not know how to impart it to me, for fear the sudden shock of happiness might hurt my reason. He adopted a score of expedients which

raised the excitement of the audience to a high pitch, and at length prevailed upon me to sing the song I sang when my husband went away. I complied in a tremulous voice, and was on the point of breaking down when, upon the waving of a handkerchief by the old sailor out of the window, my husband's voice answered me. The end came soon, and we were all again happily united.

"This simplest of simple stories went to the hearts of the islanders, and from that night it has been a custom with us three or four times during the year to give similar representations for the pleasure of ourselves and our friends. I was more than satisfied with the result; we had shown ourselves in our true colours, and had won approval.

"At this time there traded to the isle a brig whose captain was anxious to supply many articles which he said would be of use to the islanders. The brig, as I understood, was supposed to belong to Mauvain, and its visits were always regarded as an event in the peaceful land. A proposition was made by the captain that he should employ a sculptor to cut a

statue in marble of that Evangeline whose memory is cherished by the islanders, and that it should be erected in the market-place as a lasting memorial of the wonderful and terrible legend connected with the mountain of snow. He was to receive in payment a certain weight of silver extracted from a silver-mine discovered by Mauvain during his residence on the isle. The proposition was accepted, and the commission was given. There existed on the isle no picture of Evangeline which would guide the sculptor to a faithful execution of his task, and the portrait and figure of a young and beautiful girl who was often at our house was drawn by an artist, and given to the captain of the brig. There was a great deal of talk and much conversation among the islanders concerning this commission, and curiosity was raised as to the manner in which it would be executed. When the captain, who came once in every year, was expected with the statue, I was also in expectation of a new arrival—my second child, Gabrielle. She was born, and was but three days old, when my husband informed me that the brig had come and gone, and

that the statue of Evangeline was erected in the market-place. I had lost interest in it, being occupied with my baby, to the exclusion of all other subjects. It delighted me beyond measure that I had now a girl to rear and cherish. Still I adhered to my resolution not to call the child Clarice. I chose Gabrielle, a name, my husband told me, derived from that hero of God who strengthened Daniel and brought the promise to Zacharias and to the blessed Virgin.

“‘It is also,’ said Paul, ‘a promise of beauty, for there was once a Gabrielle, whose rare graces gave an immortal reputation to one of the greatest countries in the world.’

“But I cared more that my child should be good than beautiful. The sad reflection has occurred to my mind that beauty is a misfortune ; it is most certainly a perilous and sometimes a fatal gift.

“That my child Gabrielle resembles my sister Clarice may be bred by my fancy, for Gabrielle is dark, Clarice was fair.

“When I was strong enough, Matthew took me to the market-place, and showed me the statue of Evangeline. I gazed at

it in a kind of worship, and yet with terror and amazement. It fascinated me, and I could not remove my eyes from the beautiful and perfect work.

“‘ It appears,’ said Matthew, ‘ to remind you of a woman you have seen.’

“‘ It does,’ I replied ; ‘ it reminds me of my sister. Were it not impossible—’

“I paused ; the wildness of the thought arrested my speech. Matthew prompted me.

“‘ Yes. Were it not impossible—’

“‘ I should declare that the sculptor who modelled those features had a living being before him, and that that being was Clarice.’

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF MARGARET'S DIARY.

"MATTHEW strove to reason me out of this wild idea, saying that it was as irrational as ever entered a woman's brain.

"At my earnest request, however, he made inquiries concerning the sculptor, whose name could not be ascertained; but had the result of his inquiries been different, no useful purpose would have been served. It could not have brought the dead from the grave.

"Since that time, until the occurrence of an event of which I shall presently speak, my days have flowed on calmly and peacefully, disturbed only by those memories of the past with which Clarice is associated. I keep this suffering to myself; it would be ungrateful in me to ask those around me to share it with me. No woman could have a kinder husband or a wiser father

than I have. My children are healthy and well-formed, and are a constant source of joy in our house. In feature Joseph resembles his grandfather Matthew ; he is bold and determined, and can be swayed only through his affections. Matthew says suffering is in store for him, because of his sensitive spirit. Gabrielle is like me, dark and rough ; she has a hot temper, and is sometimes difficult to control. Their grandfather, who takes great delight in them, avers that they are vagrants by nature, as he was before them.

“ ‘I hope not,’ I said ; ‘I should not like to think that they will be tossed about the world, as we have been.’

“ ‘What is in the future for them,’ said Matthew gravely, ‘neither you nor I can tell. I have heard you and Paul talk together of the kind of life the children are to lead, how they are to grow up and marry and have children, who with themselves are never to leave the Silver Isle. All that can be said in favour of such conversations is that they are the harmless expression of harmless ideas.’

“ ‘They are not unreasonable. Why should parents not be able, especially in a

land so peaceful and retired as this, to predict with certainty the kind of life their children are to live ?'

" ' Because, Margaret,' replied Matthew, ' it is impossible to set exact rules of life for this or that person, however closely allied they may be to us. The seed being put into the ground, no one can say with certainty whether the tree will incline to the right or the left ; least of all can it be predicted in which direction the branches will shoot out.'"

" ' The children are of our blood.'

" ' That is just it, and our blood is vagrant blood. All we can do, simple one, is to assist nature in the way we deem best for those we love. We are the creatures of circumstance—your own story proves it. A dozen years ago could you have foretold the present ? And do you believe now that you can see the future ?'

" ' Our future is clear,' I said. ' Adventure no longer plays a part in our lives.'

" ' Easy to say so. Startling as the phases are through which we have passed, others as strange may occur before the next twelve years are gone. These matters

are not within our control. At this present moment men may be moving towards us from some distant part of the world, bringing joy or woe into our lives, despite all our efforts to shape our own ends.'

"When Joseph was seven years of age and Gabrielle four, an event occurred in the isle, which may make Matthew's words prophetic. On an autumn day a schooner came to the isle. I should have gone out to hear the news, but I had much to do at home, and rarely as the isle is visited by a ship, the event is of no personal importance to me. There are times when I shrink from the slightest contact with the world beyond these shores.

"I was alone in the house. Joseph and Gabrielle were in the fields; Matthew and my husband were absent on a fishing expedition, and were not to return till the following morning. My children came home for their evening meal; they were flushed with delight, and prattled excitedly of the pleasures of an afternoon spent among their playfellows. They are both mimics; Matthew says they have dramatic power in them, and that were we living in

the world, he would educate them for the stage. They certainly possess a great gift ; Joseph reads aloud with wonderful meaning, and many childish scenes of their own creation are depicted by them for our edification. Their grandfather encourages them, and frequently takes part in these amusing representations.

“‘Mother,’ said Joseph, when our meal was finished and cleared away, ‘ask us questions?’

“‘About what?’

“‘About the ship.’

“‘You saw it, Joseph?’

“‘Yes, and Gabrielle too. We were on the beach.’

“‘I gave him some fruit,’ said Gabrielle quickly, ‘and he whispered, “Thank you, little maid.” His voice was no louder than that.’

“She had finished her speech before Joseph could stop her.

“‘You are telling it all wrong !’ he cried ; ‘we have not come to that yet. Go on, mother.’

“‘And did a boat come ashore?’ I asked.

“‘Mother,’ interposed Gabrielle again, “am I a little maid ?”

“‘ Yes, Gabrielle. Let Joseph speak.’

“‘ He wants it all,’ pouted Gabrielle.

“‘ You shall do your part directly,’ said Joseph, with dignity, ‘ if you are quiet and good. Yes, mother, a boat came ashore.’

“‘ And the captain landed.’

“‘ It was a different captain from the others. He was better-looking and more gentle. He wore beautiful rings, and had a diamond in his shirt. He walked like this.’

“‘ My boy sauntered languidly to and fro, pretended to dangle a cane from his fingers, and looked about him with a supercilious air. Ordinary captains were not in the habit of walking thus, and I saw that he intended to represent a gentleman. Gabrielle clapped her hands.

“‘ Then,’ continued Joseph, ‘ he wanted to know if the isle was full of children who never grew any older. I did not like that. Did you, Gabrielle ? ’

“‘ No,’ answered my little girl ; ‘ I want to be a woman, like mother, and have two children, Gabrielle and Joseph, and Joseph shall do everything Gabrielle asks him.’

“‘ You are foolish,’ was Joseph’s re-

sponse; ‘men are the masters—except mother. That is why the gentleman asked us to take him to the fields, where the men were working.’

“‘What occurred after that, Joseph?’

“‘We followed him to the fields, and he threw himself upon the hay, and while some one went for Father Sebastian, Gabrielle and the other little girls and women gave him some fruit.’

“‘Yes,’ said Gabrielle, ‘and he said in a sleepy voice, “Thank you, little maid.”’

“‘After that,’ said Joseph, ‘we went down to the beach, and looked at the boat. It was a long time before the gentleman came back. Then he got into the boat, and was rowed to the ship, and he came back again, bringing a fairy and a monster.’

“‘What do you mean, Joseph?’

“‘We will show you. Come along, Gabrielle; you shall be the fairy, I am the monster.’

“They ran to the door, and presently returned, hand in hand. Gabrielle was simply Gabrielle, but Joseph was transformed. His legs were crooked, his head was shrunk into his shoulders, one of which

was higher than the other, his hair was rough, and as he walked towards me he threw suspicious looks about him.

“ ‘ He was just like that, mother,’ said Joseph, straightening himself; ‘ I never saw such a man. What had he to do with the fairy ? ’

“ ‘ I do not know, Joseph. The poor man is a cripple, perhaps. You should not mock him ; it is wrong. I have seen some who are much to be pitied. Was the little girl frightened of him ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, no ; she seemed to be fond of him.’

“ ‘ That is a proof that he is not bad. What has become of them ? ’

“ ‘ They are here.’

“ ‘ On the isle ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’

“ ‘ And the gentleman ? ’

“ ‘ He went back to his ship. Now, mother, we have told you everything. Read to us.’

“ ‘ I retired early to rest on that night, and about midnight was awakened by a sound which I fancied I heard outside the house. I arose and looked into the bedroom of my children, the door of which

opened into my own. The children were sleeping soundly. I went to bed again, and again I fancied I heard the sound, which resembled that of a man or an animal moving in the garden. I dressed myself immediately, and went into the open air. The night was beautiful, and a full moon was shining. I walked around the house, and paused at a little distance from a shed built by my husband at the back of our house. I thought I saw a movement among the shadows, and I called in a loud voice,—

“‘Is any one there?’

“A strange voice answered me. ‘Aye, mistress.’ And a man emerged from the shadows. The moment he came into the light I recognized the cripple of whom Joseph had given me a representation.

“I am not a timid woman. When called upon, I think I am capable of showing a courage of which a man need not be ashamed. This I believe to be a quality of my nature, but if it were not, there is no cause for fear upon this isle where crime is rare.

“The man who stood or crouched before me, looking up into my face, was

a dwarf, with strong misshapen limbs and nothing in his face to recommend him. I saw that he was tired and in want of rest, but he seemed to be making an endeavour to conceal his state of physical weariness from my searching gaze, and to arouse in me a feeling of repulsion by a scornful, defiant demeanour. He was not successful. My feeling for him was entirely one of commiseration.

“‘ You are the man who came to the isle to-day,’ I said.

“‘ You know me, then, mistress ? ’

“‘ I heard of you to-night from my children.’

“‘ You were not among those who welcomed me.’

“‘ I knew nothing of you until my children told me.’

“ He appeared to derive satisfaction from my replies. ‘ I thought I did not see you among these liberal-minded folk.’

“‘ What do you want here at this time ? ’

“‘ A roof ! ’ he answered.

“‘ No house in the isle would refuse you shelter.’

“‘ I preferred to seek shelter for myself.’

“‘ Where is the child ? ’

“‘ Evangeline? Sleeping in a warm bed, I hope, in one Father Sebastian’s house. Satisfied of that, I left her, to shift for myself. This is Mauvain’s property?’

“‘ Yes.’

“‘ I was curious to see it. May I sleep in that shed?’

“‘ Surely not there. Come into the house; I will give you a bed.’

“‘ And an honest welcome?’

“‘ And an honest welcome. My husband is absent, but he will approve.’

“‘ You are one in a thousand,’ he said, in a voice more gentle than he had hitherto used, ‘ and I thank you. I cannot accept your offer. Give me leave to sleep in the shed.’

“‘ You are welcome to the best I have; that is the worst.’

“‘ The worst is good enough for me. I shall not disturb you. Do not be frightened if you hear me move about. I am going to see whether the ship that brought me here is out of sight.”

“ While he was gone, I brought from the house a mattress and bed-coverings. These I made up into a bed, and placed

by its side food and water. The dwarf returned just at the finish of my task.

“‘ You have given yourself needless trouble,’ was his remark; ‘ I can sleep on the earth.’

“‘ There is no need,’ I said carelessly, in a tone of assumed indifference; ‘ one may as well accept the comforts of life when they are within reach. Time enough for hardships when we cannot avoid them.’

“ His piercing gaze searched my face for the true meaning to my words. What he gathered from the mute inquiry it is difficult to say, but I entertained for him no feeling but one of pity.

“‘ You are unlike the women of the isle I have seen,’ he remarked.

“‘ There is not one who would do less for you than I have done. Good-night.’

“‘ Stay, or I shall think you begrudge what you offer. You are unlike them in appearance, I mean.’

“‘ I was not born on the isle.’

“‘ How long have you lived here?’

“‘ Seven years and more.’

“‘ You are almost as much a stranger here as I am, then. Step a little into

the light ; I want to see you more clearly.'

"I humoured him, and moved to a part of the ground where the full light of the moon had free play.

"As I stood there, with his eyes upon me, I became suddenly conscious that my senses were leaving me ; landscape and sky appeared to be fading from my sight. I aroused myself by a determined effort ; the blurred figure of the dwarf became clear again, and he was speaking,—

"'There is a perfume in the air to which I am not accustomed ; it beguiles my senses. Where have I seen your face ? In a dream ? As if I have not had enough of dreams ! Stay but for another moment ; I will not harm you. That mountain of snow yonder, with its white mists moving like monster clouds. Is it inhabited ?'

"'Yes,' I replied, and the answer seemed to be forced from me, 'by the spirits of the dead.'

"'A proper place for the dead. There is yet one thing more before I say good-night. I brought a child with me to the isle.'

“ ‘ I know—Evangeline.’

“ ‘ No fairer child lives on earth. She needs a home, and she must have one with a woman I can trust. Go to Father Sebastian’s house to-morrow, and, if you are drawn to the child, adopt her as one of your own. It will be a good thing done, but do not undertake it if you feel you cannot love Evangeline. Promise me.’

“ ‘ I promise you.’

“ ‘ I accept your hospitality. Good-night.’

“ ‘ Good-night.’

“ He went into the shed, and I into my house, with no thought in my mind but of him and Evangeline. When I slept I dreamt of him and of the child I had not yet seen.

“ Early in the morning my husband and Matthew returned home from their fishing expedition, and at my request accompanied me to the house of Father Sebastian. On our way I told them my purpose, and they expressed their acquiescence in my purpose with regard to Evangeline. Before we started we looked into the shed for the dwarf. He was gone, and we saw nothing of him on the road.

"To Father Sebastian I explained the object of our visit, and he sent for the child, saying that my proposal required less consideration than if it had proceeded from any other inhabitant of the isle.

"'It is fitting,' said Father Sebastian, 'that she should find a home with you, in the house belonging to Mauvain. She is a charge from Mauvain himself. This letter will explain how it has come about. Upon its receipt yesterday I, without knowing to what it referred, accepted the trust in the name of the islanders. My surprise was great when I saw the child and her strange companion; but I had no intention of going from my word.'

"Matthew read Mauvain's letter aloud. It was to the effect that he sent by a friend named Harold—the gentleman, I supposed, of whom my little Joseph gave me a representation the previous night—a trust which he confided to the islanders, and that he might come one day to the isle to thank his friends for their kindness. The letter was courteous, and the language that of a scholar and a gentleman.

"'It is a singular trust,' said Matthew.

“‘It has occupied my thoughts during the night,’ said Father Sebastian, ‘and I can come to but one conclusion. The child is an orphan, and an appeal was probably made to Mauvain to give her some kind of protection. In these circumstances Mauvain thought of the isle in which he spent many happy years, and, attracted by the innocence and beauty of the child, decided that no securer shelter could be found for one without natural protectors. It is a kindly act, and Mauvain is to be commended for it. Another hypothesis strengthens my conclusion. The child’s name happened to be Evangeline; Mauvain is familiar with the fatal story connected with the snow mountain ; and he said, “I will send my island friends a new Evangeline as fair as the old, whom they can protect and cherish and grow to love.” A tender eccentricity.’

“‘My daughter,’ said Matthew, ‘has given me a description of the dwarf who accompanies the child. Can you explain that connection ?’

“‘I cannot,’ replied Father Sebastian ; ‘it is a mystery which perplexes me. It is certain that there is no kinship between

them, and certain also that they bear for each other a very human love.'

"At this moment Evangeline was brought into the room.

"Never shall I forget the feelings which overpowered me at the sight of the sweet and beautiful child. They say that the longest dream lasts but a moment, and it may be that only for a moment was I unconscious of surrounding things; that the years which have passed since my childhood were suddenly blotted from my life, as though they had never been; that I was a child again and Clarice was a child, and that we were listening to the kind voice of our father, who was explaining to us the mystery of the stars. Such a night was ours in the past, fixed for ever in my memory by a chance look at Clarice's face turned upwards to the sky. So do I carry in my memory the eternal fragrance of a handful of violets, given to us by a woman in a country lane when we were children.

"It passed, and the child Evangeline was before me, gazing earnestly into my face.

"It is not that her features resemble those of Clarice. Her eyes are of a dif-

ferent colour, her mouth is larger, her hands broader and covered with dimples ; but that altogether she brings my dear sister to my mind with painful vividness.

“ I have not confessed this to my husband or our father. It might cause them to regard me as being a victim entirely to my imagination. There are secrets we keep even from those who are dearest to us.

“ I was not conscious that tears were in my eyes until Father Sebastian remarked it.

“ ‘ It is the thought of this pretty one,’ I said, ‘ thrown upon the chance love of strangers.’

“ I knelt upon the ground, and I knew that the men were regarding me with tender looks.

“ ‘ Child,’ I said, drawing Evangeline to me, ‘ do you think you could love me ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ she said.

“ ‘ We want you to live with us ; I will be a mother to you.’ She echoed the word ‘ Mother,’ as though it were strange to her. ‘ You remember your mother ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ No,’ she replied.

“ ‘ You will come with us, dear child ? ’

“‘ If Ranf does not mind. He must tell me.’

“ I kissed her, and turned to Father Sebastian. ‘ You are content that we shall adopt her, sir?’

“‘ It is the best arrangement that can be made.’

“ My husband and Matthew also approved, and that day Evangeline entered her new home.

“ In the evening Ranf made his appearance. We exchanged but few words. He stipulated that he should see Evangeline at any time he wished, and that she should visit him when he desired. He spoke to the child, who certainly entertains an extraordinary affection for him.

“‘ Have you any questions to ask me?’ he said before he left.

“‘ But one. Has she neither father nor mother?’

“‘ Neither. The child is doubly orphaned.’

“ With that he left me, and although three months have passed, has never again crossed our threshold. But Evangeline has gone to him. He imitates a bird’s notes, and she runs out eagerly at the sound.

"Joseph and Gabrielle are delighted with her; they yield to her every caprice, and with the children she is full of whims. With me she is more sedate. Since she joined our household my life has undergone a wonderful change. The past seems nearer to me; I think even more frequently of Clarice than I have been in the habit of doing. Once, with Evangeline standing at my knee, I said to her,—

"Did you know a beautiful woman called Clarice?"

"She shook her head. 'No.'

"Did you never hear the name?"

"No; it is pretty; I like it."

"Try to remember it, dear child."

"Yes, I will try to remember it." And she murmured the name softly to herself.

"The days pass quietly. Ranf has built huts for himself on the snow mountain; he is as much hated by the islanders as Evangeline is loved. But in some mysterious undefinable way his life seems to be bound up with ours.

"I am glad I have made this record. It has comforted me."

CHAPTER XIV.

JOSEPH GIVES EVANGELINE A PROOF OF HIS
LOVE.

THE years glided peacefully away, and no event of importance disturbed the repose of the Silver Isle. Evangeline, elected by Joseph and Gabrielle as their queen, wore her crown with the innocent audacity of childhood, and ruled her little kingdom with absolute authority. She was capricious, but not tyrannical, imperious, but not boastful; in their home amusements and woodland rambles her moods and whims were anxiously consulted by her young subjects, who were most happy when she was pleased and satisfied. That she should be obeyed appeared to be natural; it was a pleasant servitude, and Evangeline's close connection with Ranf enabled her to introduce colour and variety into the lives of the children.

Ranf's position in the isle did not improve as the years passed by. He lived his lonely life upon the mountain of snow, and did not even ask from the islanders the service of occasional companionship. He was at times compelled to move among them, needing certain articles and necessaries of life which he had no independent means of obtaining. These he bought and paid for with scrupulous honesty, driving no hard bargains, and using as few words as possible in the negotiations. Shortly after his arrival upon the Silver Isle he presented to Father Sebastian a paper signed by Mauvain, requesting that Ranf should be allowed to extract silver from the mine for a few days now and then, if it did not interfere with the arrangements of the islanders. The dwarf was informed that he was free to work the mine when he pleased, upon the condition that Mauvain's royalty of one-tenth was respected. He availed himself of the permission, and being a man of enormous strength and endurance succeeded in obtaining much treasure by working a few weeks in every year. With this silver he purchased, through the agency of the captains of the

vessels which at rare intervals visited the isle, what he most needed and desired. He sent for rope, chains, goats, and birds, which without help he conveyed to his mountain huts. The birds were carrier-pigeons, which he reared with the greatest pains and care. Dogs also he bought, so that his huts were surrounded with life subservient to his will. His amazing industry, leading apparently to no result, at first raised curiosity, and the islanders asked each other what this strange creature wanted with ropes and chains, and why he had built for himself three huts, one near the valley, one in the centre of the mountain, and one within a couple of hundred yards of the topmost peak; but there was not a man on the isle who cared to inquire further into the matter by venturing into that lonely region, defiled by human crime and cursed by God. Indeed, as time went on, common usage established a right, and the mountain was looked upon as Ranf's lawful home, upon which none had warranty to intrude without just cause. Ranf's restless presence added a new horror to the spot, and numerous were the stories

which grew out of his goings to and fro, not only in the day, but in the night, for it appeared as if this deformed being could live without sleep. In all these stories, and in all that surrounded Ranf's life and movements, imagination played its part to the dwarf's disadvantage, and even those of the islanders most charitably inclined were loth to admit that the circumstance of a man surrounding himself with that kind of animal life which was typical of faithfulness and gentleness, spoke in his favour. Ranf had pronounced judgment upon himself. His open violation of religious observance, and his systematic defiance of the laws of social life, caused him to be regarded as an outlaw.

He did not murmur. One person loved him, a child, it was true, but more likely on that account to be sincere in the expression of her feelings. With that love he was content. He neither asked nor expected to be received as a guest by the Sylvesters, but Margaret knew that he kept close watch over Evangeline, and she received proof that the feeling the dwarf entertained for the child was as deep as it was sincere. Evangeline had been with

them a year when she was taken ill, and for nearly a month was not allowed to leave the house. Margaret, nursing the child, heard Ranf's signal, a faithful imitation of the song of the lark. She went out immediately, but the dwarf did not present himself. In the rear of the house was a stretch of woodland, thickly clustered with trees, and it was here that Ranf and Evangeline were in the habit of meeting. Ranf from his hiding-place could see who it was that answered his signal, and when Evangeline appeared he continued his clear notes, walking slowly into the closer shelter of the trees, Evangeline following him, until they reached a spot where they could converse in private. Upon this occasion, seeing Margaret approach, he was silent, and kept himself from her sight. She waited, however, and presently imitated Ranf's call. Judging from this that she had news for him, and having reason to trust her, he replied to her, and guided her to the spot on which he stood.

"I heard your signal," she said, "and came at once."

"It is not you I want," he said.
"Where is Evangeline?"

“ She is ill.”

He turned white at the news, and exhibited so much emotion that Margaret felt a great compassion for this lonely man, who had but a single human being in the world to love. She explained that Evangeline was suffering from one of the common ailments of children, and that with care she would almost certainly recover.

“ May a blight,” cried Ranf, “ fall upon the land if anything evil happens to my little flower! May plague destroy it, and fire burn it ! ”

“ Hush ! ” said Margaret sternly ; “ better to pray to God for our little one’s recovery. If you would have your own opinions respected, pay respect to those of others. Your language is not fit for a woman’s ears ; how much less, then, for the ears of a child ! ”

“ You are right, mistress,” muttered Ranf ; “ I ask your pardon. I would not harm her to save my soul.”

“ You may come in and see the child if you like ; she knows no one ; in her delirium she has often mentioned your name.”

"Thank you," he said humbly ; "I will come in and see her."

"You will not speak to her ; she must be kept perfectly quiet."

Ranf followed Margaret into the house, with steps lighter than her own. Evangeline lay in a large cool room, covered with bedclothes of snowy whiteness ; her eyes were closed, her little hands were agitated by feverish movement. In the distant window facing the child were a few loose flowers ; the window was partly open, and the sweet air flowed in.

"She likes to see the flowers," whispered Margaret ; "yesterday, when she opened her eyes and looked towards the window, she smiled at them."

Ranf nodded, and stood looking down upon the child ; something in her pale face, or in the quietude of the room, touched him nearly, for his eyes were filled with tears.

"May I take her hand ?" he asked in a whisper.

"Be very gentle," said Margaret.

Ranf knelt by the bedside, and softly placed his rough hand on Evangeline's pretty fingers. The action did not disturb her, nor did she move when he pressed his

thick coarse lips to the tender palm. For some time he knelt in silence, and when he rose to leave the room, he beckoned to Margaret. She accompanied him into the air.

“There is no danger, you think,” he said.

“She will recover, by the mercy of God.”

He did not quarrel with the formula, but gave Margaret a grateful look.

“I am your friend for ever,” he said; “remember that. But for you, Evangeline might have died.”

“She is as one of my own,” said Margaret, “and has brought to me the sweetest and most painful remembrances.”

“It is a life of suffering,” was Ranf’s commentary. “Those who love least, suffer least. Mistress, until Evangeline is well, I must have some place near here to sleep in.”

“You will not come into the house?”

“No. I slept once in that shed yonder with your permission. May I do so again?”

“You are welcome. We do not use the shed.”

“Place nothing in it, neither bed, nor food, nor anything you suppose would add to my comfort. I shall feel more at my ease if I am allowed to come and go of my own free will, and I prefer to look after myself.”

“You shall have your way.”

“I shall come only in the night, and it is not likely you will see me. I would ask another favour at your hands.”

“Give it words.”

“If all has gone well with Evangeline during the day, place outside her window a flower, so that I may see it when I come in the night.”

“It shall be done.”

She had an intuitive knowledge of the best way to treat this strange creature, and her words were few and to the point. Thinking of him after this interview, she began to pity him in her heart, and to wonder what kind of life had been his to render men and the ways of men so hateful in his eyes. In that one house in all the Silver Isle some feeling of compassion was felt for the lonely man.

Every evening Margaret placed a flower outside the window of Evangeline’s bed-

room. Evangeline's recovery was slow but sure, and when she was strong enough to leave her bed, the child—having been told by Margaret why and for whom a flower was placed on the window-sill in the evening—placed another by its side, saying,—

“Ranf will know it comes from me.”

Margaret informed her husband and Matthew that she had given Ranf the use of the shed, and the children were warned not to enter it by day or night.

“He may have it altogether if he likes,” said the men; “there is no occasion to say anything about it. He will get to learn in time that we look upon it as his.”

This happened without any words passing between them; and when one morning Margaret Sylvester found two lovely white goats, each with a kid, tethered to a post near the entrance to her house, she knew that they came from Ranf as a mark of friendship and gratitude.

To Joseph and Gabrielle, Ranf was a being of wonderful and mysterious importance. In so far as he was removed from ordinary creatures, so far was he

above them. That Evangeline loved him was sufficient to elevate him in their eyes. Ugly and ungainly as he was, he was in some sense a hero, whose hand it would be an honour to touch. Up to a certain time they were only friends with him vicariously, Evangeline being the intermediary. It was years before he spoke to them, and when he came upon them suddenly in the forest, Gabrielle, trembling, scarcely dared to raise her eyes above his knees. Joseph, though inwardly shaken, was bolder, and returned Ranf's searching look with one of modest curiosity. He answered with outward confidence the questions put to him by Ranf, and the dwarf appeared to be pleased with him. This was Joseph's impression, and was confirmed by Evangeline in a conversation out of which sprang an adventure which established a friendship between Joseph and Ranf.

"Ranf likes you," said Evangeline to Joseph.

"Did he say so?" asked Joseph.

"No; but I can tell. He likes you because I do."

This would have been humiliating to one who aspired to be illustrious in him-

self ; but Joseph was content to receive lustre through Evangeline.

“ Did he ask that ? ” inquired Joseph.

“ What ? ”

“ Whether you liked me ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And you do like me ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Better than anybody ? ”

Evangeline considered before she answered. “ Except Ranf.”

“ What would you do for me ? ” asked Joseph anxiously.

“ Anything,” she replied vaguely.

“ What would you give me ? ”

“ Everything.”

Joseph’s mind at present was more definite.

“ Ask me questions,” he said. It was a favourite request of his when he had anything he wished particularly to say or do. “ Questions about you and me.”

“ Do you like me, Joseph ? ”

“ More.”

“ Do you love me ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Better than anybody ? ”

“ Yes ; better than anybody.”

“ Better than Gabrielle ? ”

“ That is different.”

“ Why is it different ? ”

“ I don’t know, but it is.”

“ You have not told me, though,” persisted Evangeline.

“ I love you better than Gabrielle.”

“ Does she know that ? ”

“ Yes, and she says it is right.”

“ Why is it right ? ”

“ I don’t know, but it is.”

“ May I tell Ranf ? ”

“ Yes, I should like him to know ; I should like everybody to know.”

“ Do you love me better than you love your mother ? ”

It was an unkind question, and Joseph’s lips trembled as he answered,—

“ Yes, but that is different, too.”

“ Does your mother know that ? ”

“ No, and I should not like to tell her.”

“ Then it can’t be right.”

“ It must be right, because it is you. It would not be if it were anybody else. I would like you to understand, Evangeline.”

“ Make me understand, Joseph.”

Joseph looked around for an inspiration. It came to him in the form of a broken branch which lay upon the ground. A light flashed into his eyes ; he stooped and picked up the branch.

“This is a good thick stick,” he said ; “look at it, Evangeline ; it is full of knots.”

“I see.”

“If my mother said to me, ‘Joseph, put your left hand on that stone, and strike it hard with the branch, as hard as you can,’ I should ask her why she wished me to hurt myself ; I am not sure whether I should not throw the branch away, and tell her if she wanted to hurt me, she must do it herself.”

Joseph’s left hand lay upon the stone ; in his right he grasped the branch.

“Well, Joseph,” said Evangeline, “I don’t understand yet.”

“You will presently. That is what I should do if mother desired me to strike myself. But if you were to say to me, ‘Joseph, strike as hard as you can, and show me how much you love me,’ you would see what I would do.”

The children looked straight at each

other for a moment. Then Evangeline, suddenly closing her eyes, cried,—

“ Joseph, strike as hard as you can, and show me how much you love me.”

She heard the sound of a blow, and she opened her eyes in fear. Joseph’s bleeding hand lay upon the stone, and Joseph was gazing at her with a proud smile on his face.

“ Oh, Joseph, Joseph !” cried Evangeline. “ What have you done ? ”

“ Tried to show how much I love you,” replied Joseph, with no tremor in his voice, although his hand was sorely wounded. “ I would do more than that. Do you understand now ? ”

“ Yes, I understand. Oh, Joseph, Joseph, how could you do such a thing ? How could you hurt me so ? I feel it more than you do ! It is cruel, cruel ! ”

She took the wounded hand in hers, and her tears fell upon it. In her remorse she raised it to her lips and kissed it. An exquisite thrill of happiness stirred the boy’s heart.

“ Will you kiss me, Evangeline ? ”

She kissed him passionately, and left the trace of blood upon his lips. Then

she drew him to a spring of water, and bathed the wound, and wrapped her handkerchief round it. Joseph laughed gaily.

"It does not hurt, Evangeline," he said. "You must not cry. If it was your little hand instead of mine, it would be different."

"Joseph," whispered Evangeline, "I will never, never be cruel again."

"You must not say that," said Joseph with an air of gravity; "because, as Grandfather Matthew says, we never know what is coming."

"There's blood on your lips, Joseph; let me wipe it off."

He held her hand to prevent her.

"There's blood on your lips, too, Evangeline. Do not wipe it away. Let it remain; then we shall not forget."

"I shall never forget, Joseph."

"Nor shall I."

"Does your hand pain you now?"

"No; it was never so well. What are you wrapping the branch in your frock for?"

"I am going to keep it, Joseph, all my life."

"You must promise me one thing, Evangeline."

"What is it?"

"You must promise me beforehand."

"I promise."

"Mother nor any of my people," the phrase came to Joseph, and he gave utterance to it in a lofty tone, "must know of this."

"They ought to be told, Joseph."

"They shall not be told, Evangeline. I have your promise."

She felt that it was out of consideration for her that the promise was extracted. Of her own will she would have related voluntarily the story of Joseph's heroism and her own wilfulness, and would have gloried in showing herself in the worst and Joseph in the brightest light. However, it was not to be; the secret was between her and Joseph, and another, from whom she concealed nothing.

"Ranf must know, Joseph."

"As you please about that. He will not talk of it to anybody else."

That night Joseph, with boyish enthusiasm, looked at his lips stained with the blood of Evangeline's kiss. He would

have liked to retain that mark for ever. It could not be; but deeper and more lasting than any outward sign was to be the remembrance of the secret bond which bound him to Evangeline for ever and ever. As he nursed his wounded hand in his sleep he dreamt of greater deeds performed for her sake, of greater suffering endured in her behalf. It was a proud epoch in his young life, and his state of exaltation was purified and freed from selfish dross by an innate nobility of nature which one day in the future might blossom into heroic fire.

END OF VOL. I.



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